

THE BOYS AND SALLY

Down on a Plantation

by ROSE B. KNOX



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Boys and Sally down on a
plantation

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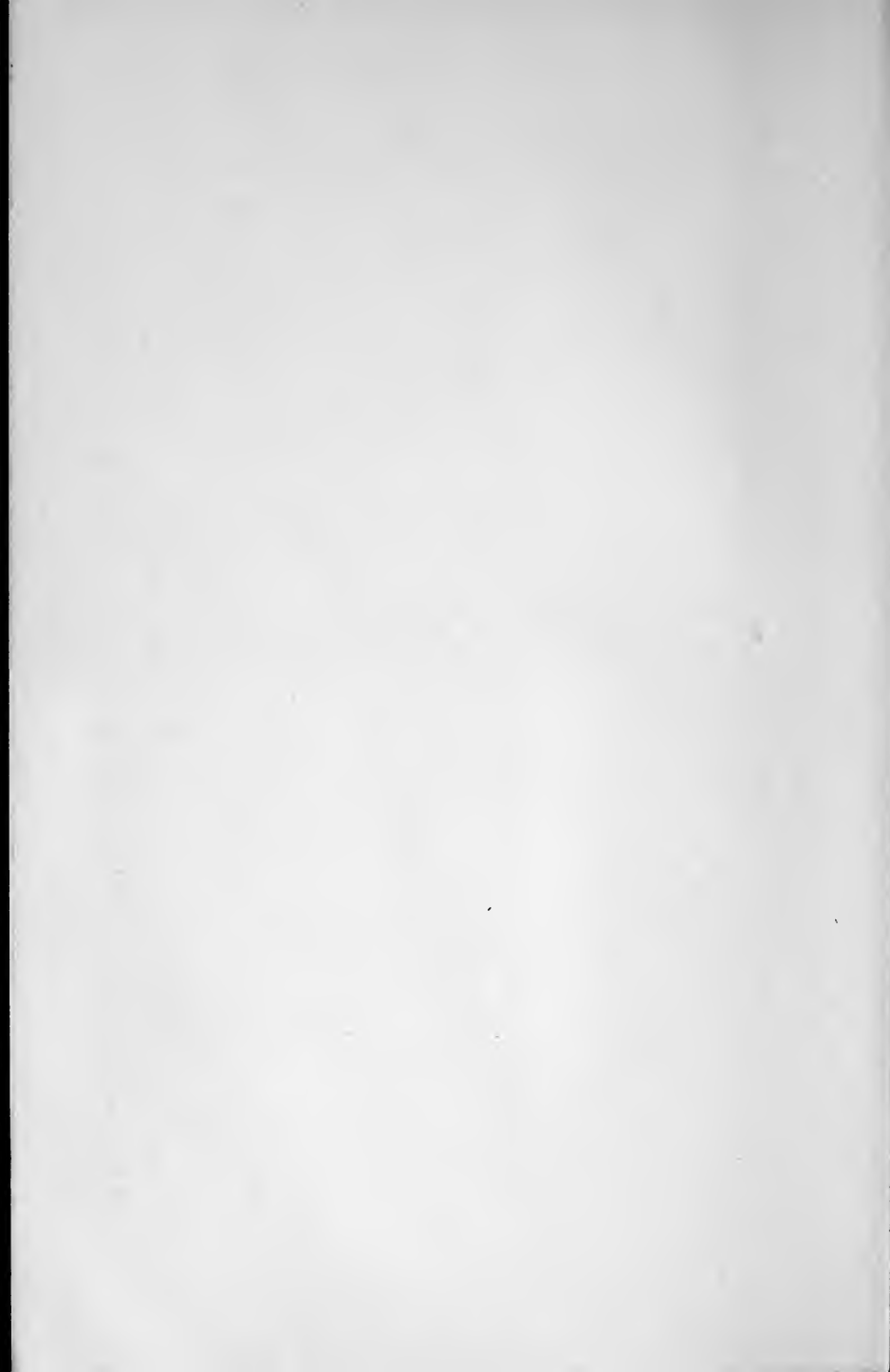


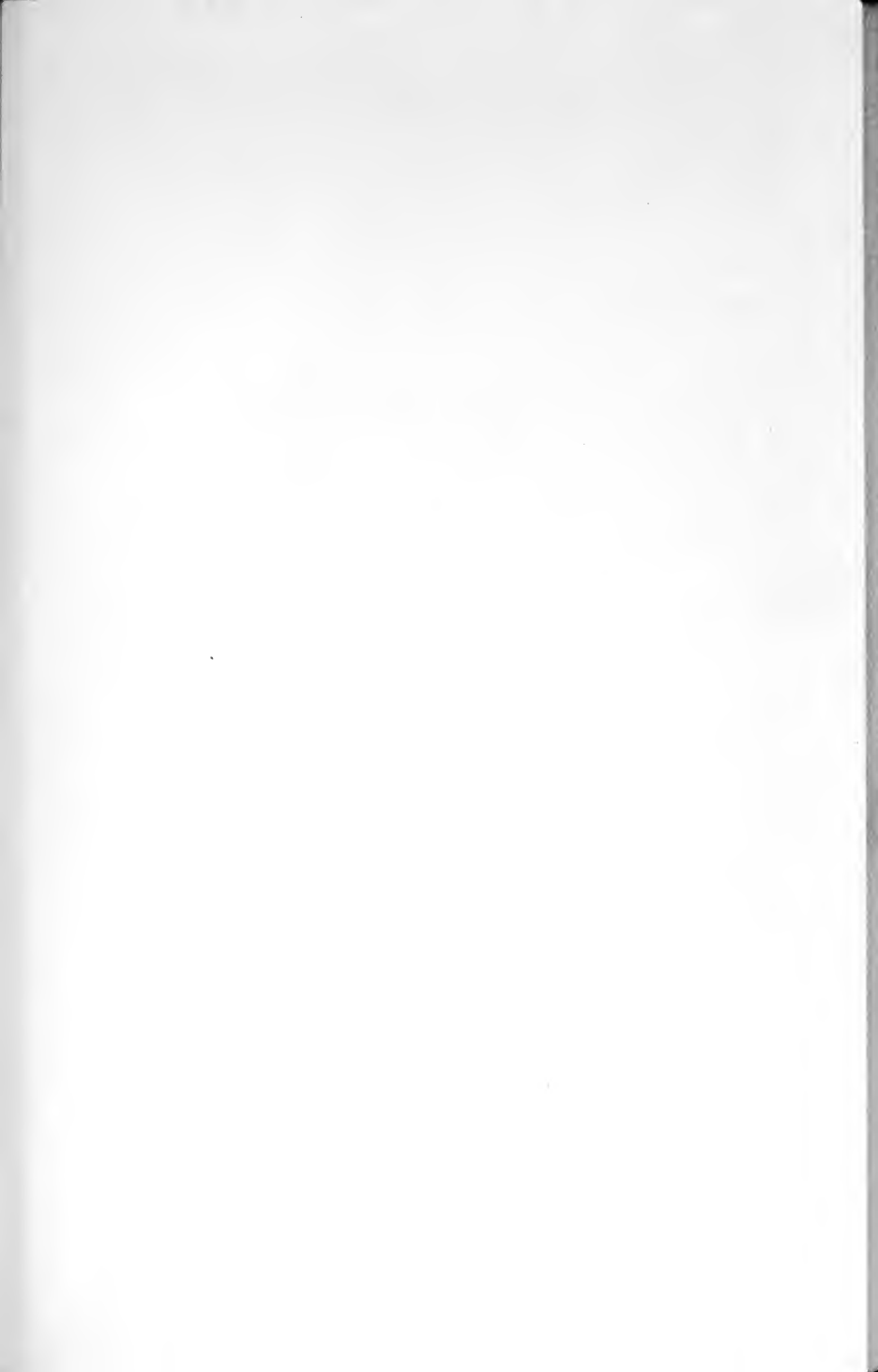


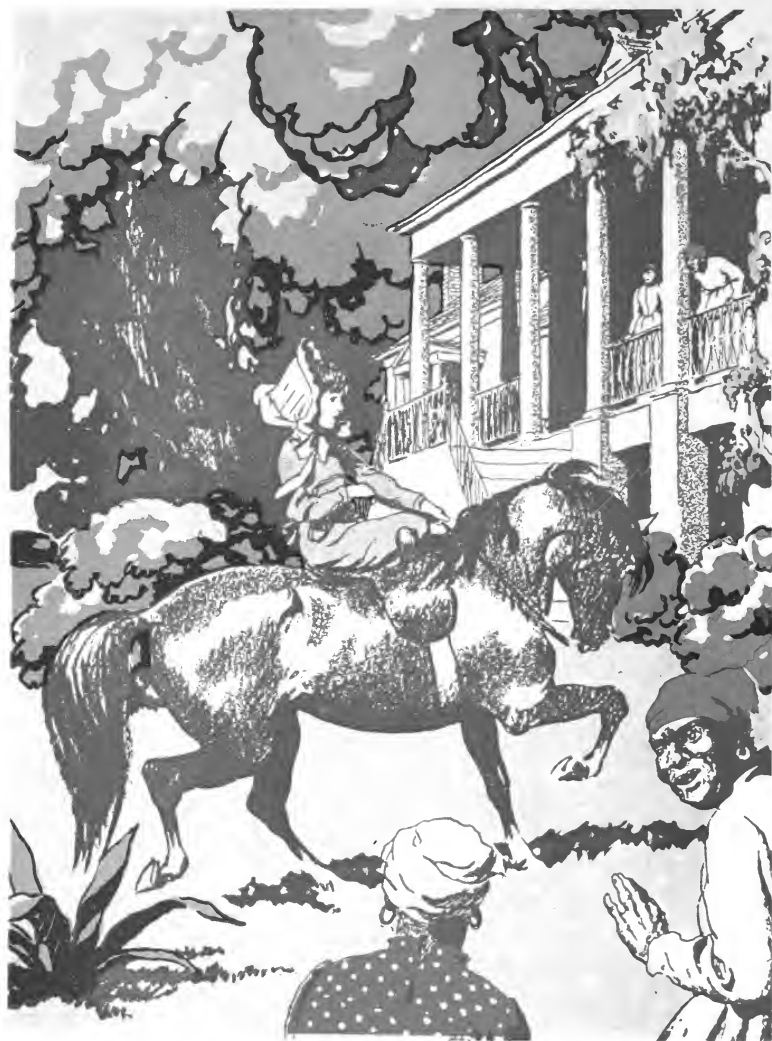


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Sally pulled up in great style before the assembled household

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BY

ROSE B. KNOX



ILLUSTRATED BY MANNING DEV. LEE

Junior Books

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.

GARDEN CITY 1942 NEW YORK

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TO
MY DEAR AUNT CARRIE
MRS. JOHN B. KNOX
THIS BOOK IS LOVINGLY
INSCRIBED

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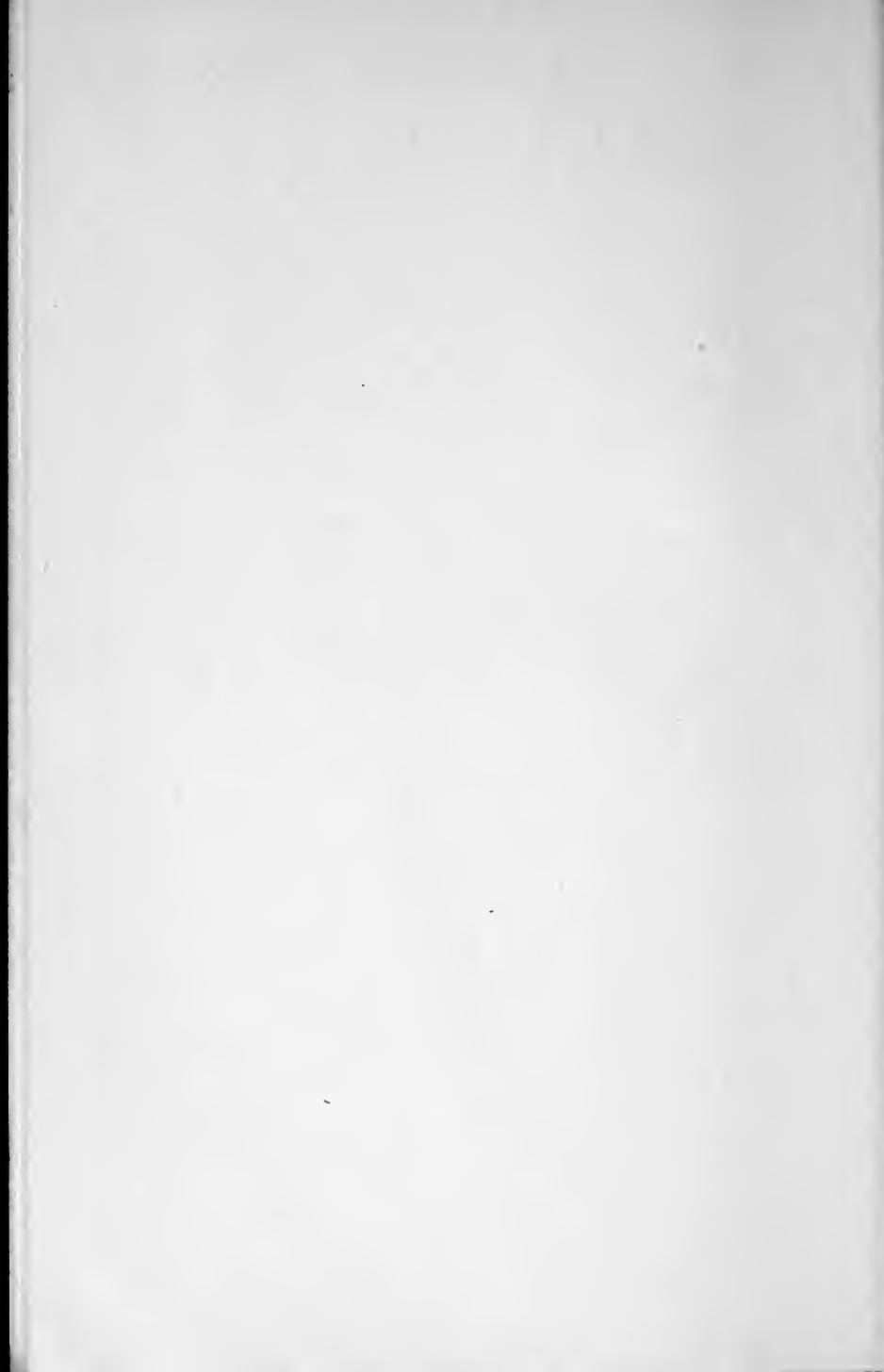
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CHAPTER I

ALL ABOARD

FOR some moments interesting sounds had been drifting into the playroom, but Sally, sprawled out in front of the fire, oceans deep in her book, at first heard nothing at all. Then she slowly came back to earth, lifted her head, and cocked an attentive ear. Yes, some commotion was surely going on! Down went *Little Women*, and Sally was up in a flash.

"Oh, pshaw!" she began crossly. "I wanted to finish——" — when Father's voice, calling for Mammy, made her hurry to the sitting room. Here Mother sat with a letter in her hand, her pretty color all gone

and tears rolling down her cheeks, while Father begged her not to cry.

"Oh, Mammy," she sobbed, "Mamma is ill and I must go to her. There's a train after dinner. Can we get ready? I may have to stay a long time, and I don't know what to do about the children."

Mammy, who used to be Mother's nurse too, began to pat her and say:

"Now, now, Miss Kate, don't take on so, chile," while the others added comforting words.

"Don't worry about us one bit, Mother darling. I'll take good care of Brother," said Sally with her most grown-up air.

"An' I'll be a good boy, Mother, and stay with Sister," promised Van, who adored Sally and trotted contentedly after her all day long when she would let him.

"I believe I've thought of just the thing!" exclaimed Father. "Why can't I take the children right on down to White Hills for awhile, Kate? You know Brother Louis and Sister are always begging for them, and it's really a shame they've never been down on the plantation before."

Mammy murmured approval, and the children clamored with delight. Mother cheered up and agreed that it was a splendid idea. Perhaps she, too, could

go down for a visit when Grandmamma was better.

With that they all began to bustle around at a great rate. Sally especially, for she had to decide what books she could bear to leave behind and to help Van with his toys. She had to say good-bye to the neighbors, and run errands, and give many loving last looks at the blue mountains of northern Alabama which climbed up to the sky in the distance. Then she had to watch Benjamin, the cat, who would not stay out of their trunks. Sally fished him out three times, much to his disgust, and she was so afraid he would be shut in after all!

Mother collected things, Mammy packed, and Father kept weaving around, getting in everyone's way, calling every minute or so:

"Hurry up, hurry up, we'll miss the train!"

They didn't, but it was a close shave and a grand scramble at the last. Mother's train went first, then Father and the children piled hastily on theirs.

"All aboard!" called the conductor.

"Good-bye, good-bye!" shouted Sally.

"Bye-bye," echoed Van. And off went the engine, puffing and pulling, leaving behind on the platform old Mammy and Cook, with tears running down their black cheeks as they looked longingly after their departing family.

Farther down on the platform two mountaineers, a man and a boy, also looked longingly after the train.

"I wish we-uns could git to ride on that thar snortin' thing, but hit takes money. Them thar young-uns air shore purty an' peart, hain't they, Rich?" asked Jim, the man.

His stepson Richard, who had been staring at the excited group of travelers, nodded in agreement as they plodded silently on again along the track.

The two had come from far back and high up in those blue mountains that Sally loved to watch, and they were in hard straits. Not long before, Minnie, who was Jim's second wife and Richard's stepmother, had died. She had been buried over at the little church thirty miles across the mountains, and Jim and Richard were away several days. When they came back they found smoking, charred trees all along their ridge, and their cabin and stock were gone. A forest fire had swept the mountainside and taken all it found in its path. They had no food and no home and only the clothes they wore. It was still very cold, so they could not stay.

"I reckon we'uns 'll go down the mounting to Birmingham," Jim said forlornly. "I've got a sister a-living thar. I kin git work somewhar."

But there was no work along the way, so they were obliged to beg, and sleep in old sheds. At last they tramped into Birmingham, a very sorry-looking pair!

Jim's sister was not glad to see them. The little leaky house she lived in was hardly big enough for her own crowd of children, and there wasn't food enough to go around. Many poor people were out of work. She said bitter words to Jim, but agreed to let him stay for a little while. Richard must go at once. He was only Jim's stepson, and no real kin of hers.

Jim was troubled. He was not a bad man, though he was lazy and ignorant, and the boy seemed like his own.

"I dunno whut ter do, Rich," he said.

They stayed that night on a quilt in one corner of the dirty attic. Jim went to sleep quickly, but Richard lay awake for a long time. He was hungry and cold and so alone. He had only Jim, and soon he wouldn't have even him. The tears would not stay back, and he sobbed miserably. Then suddenly a thought came—perhaps on a glimmer of starlight which slipped through a hole in the roof and sparkled through Richard's tears.

His own father's people—where were they?

Southern Alabama, wasn't it? Memories drifted back: things his mother had said; things Jim had repeated.

"I'll go find 'em," he murmured and, comforted, fell asleep.

It seemed queer, but the next morning, as soon as he waked, Jim said:

"Rich, why don't you go to your own pa's folks? I'd plum fergot 'em. They hain't pore folks like us; 'fore the war they was big rich. Yer ma 'lowed she was a-goin' to send you down ter see 'em. 'Tain't so powerful fur from here to Blank County, down in south Alabamy whar he come from."

Thus it was that Richard Lyle started to find the land of his fathers and his own kin!

CHAPTER II

WHITE HILLS

ON AND on and on rushed the train, through tunnels, over high trestles, between deep cuts, across streams. Soon the mountains faded into the distance while the air grew warmer and more spring-like as they whizzed southward. Just as Sally and Van began to think there was no end to their journey into a new and undreamed of world, their train stopped at a wayside station, and here, on the platform, was the long-promised aunty. Such an aunty! When the children saw her they saw nothing else, for she seemed to have stepped straight out of a story book. She was tall, slender, and altogether lovely. Her eyes smiled and loved them at the same time, and for all her dainty frock and gloves, she gathered the grimy pair in her arms.

"My precious babies!" she said, as she hugged them tight—so tight that they didn't see Father swing back on the train, now slowly moving away. In a moment things were stirring, and presently

they were all riding in a comfortable carriage along a white road, out toward the plantation. It was quite dark when they drove into the lane to the big house and, though they tried very hard afterward, Sally and Van could never clearly remember anything about that evening.

Streaming bands of light from the windows; a big uncle with strong arms; a small nursemaid named Lou, instead of old Mammy; bread and milk; a warm cuddly feather bed; good-night kisses—all were tangled up and lost in the soft, deep nothingness of their first night at White Hills.

The night was over. The sun was coming up. The birds and chickens were making much chatter outdoors. The big white rooster walked around under the children's window and crowed loudly several times. The fragrant smell of Aunty's early morning coffee floated in from the hall.

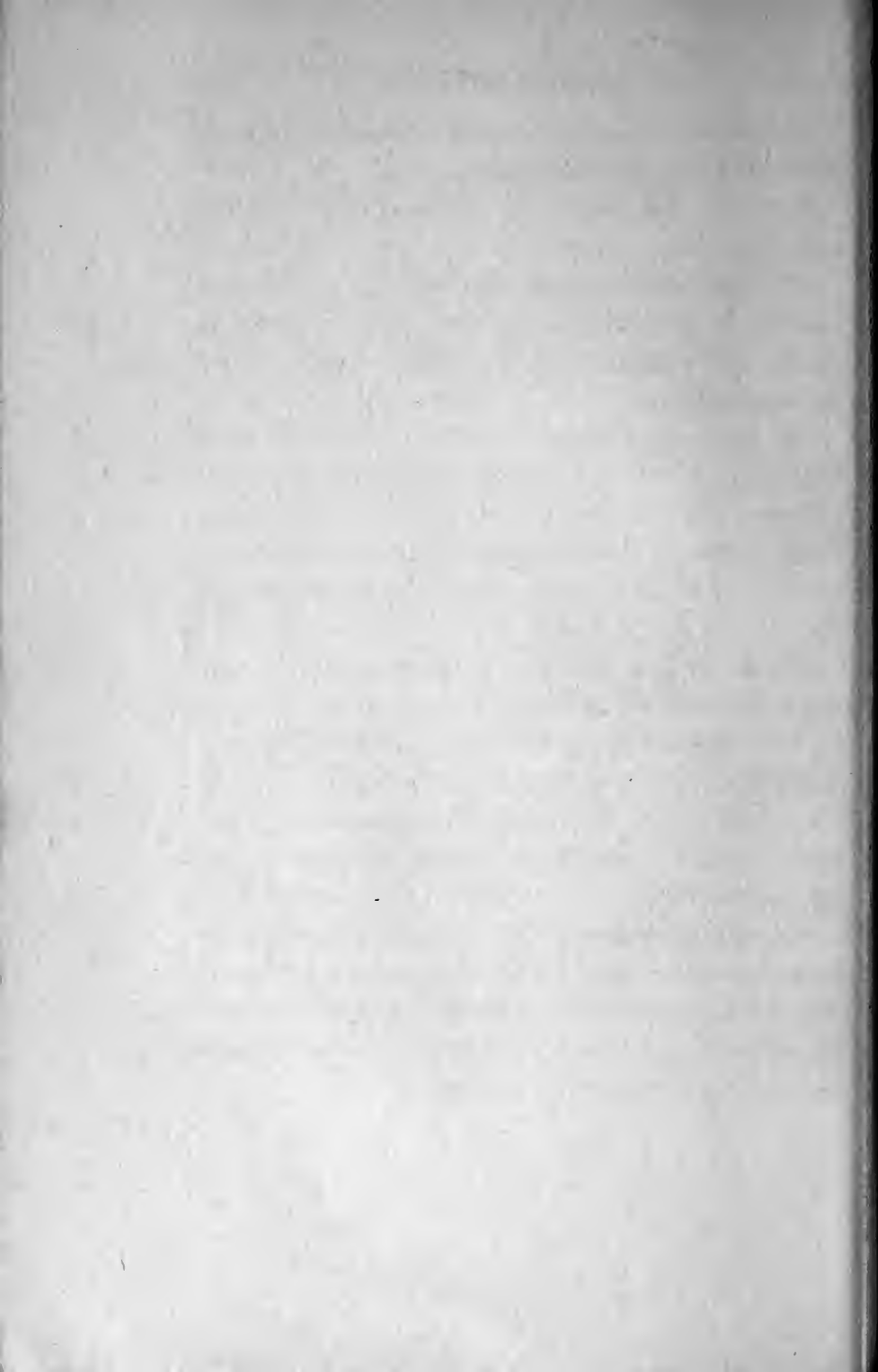
Lou came to rouse the children.

"Wake up, li'l' chilluns, wake up! Ol' Mr. Rooster done call en call de time. Breakfas' mos' done. Hop up en let Lou git yo' ready."

Van's eyes flew open, looked around, and filled with tears. No Mammy, no Mother, everything strange. But the tears did not fall, Lou was too quick.



"Who wants to go to the lot with me?" asked Uncle Louis



"Come on, honey-chile—er pup's out in de back yard jes' er-whinin' fer to see dis boy."

"Oh-h-h," breathed Van, "is he truly?" And the tears were gone.

"He sho' am," said Lou. "En he's got a white spot mos' in de eye, en de wagglin'es' tail!" Van was so excited he waggled himself, till Lou could hardly get him dressed.

But Sally was a sleepy-head! Lou rolled her out of bed, dressed her, willy-nilly, and led her, still half asleep, to the dining room. She ate hominy and fried sweet potatoes drowsily, but by the time little Dilsey brought in the hot batter cakes, she began to look about.

Aunty, in her dainty morning sacque with tiny rosebuds sprinkled all over it, smiled at her over the fat silver coffee pot. Uncle Louis was big and cheerful in his fresh starched blue suit, which just matched his twinkling eyes. Betsy, the dining room girl, in her brown check dress and turkey-red apron, waved a long-handled brush of peacock feathers to keep off the flies.

A delightful china hen with bright red comb and glittering yellow eyes sat in state on a brown nest. When Aunty lifted her, there in the nest were the breakfast eggs. A wide-awake Sally found her tongue and quickly made up for lost time.

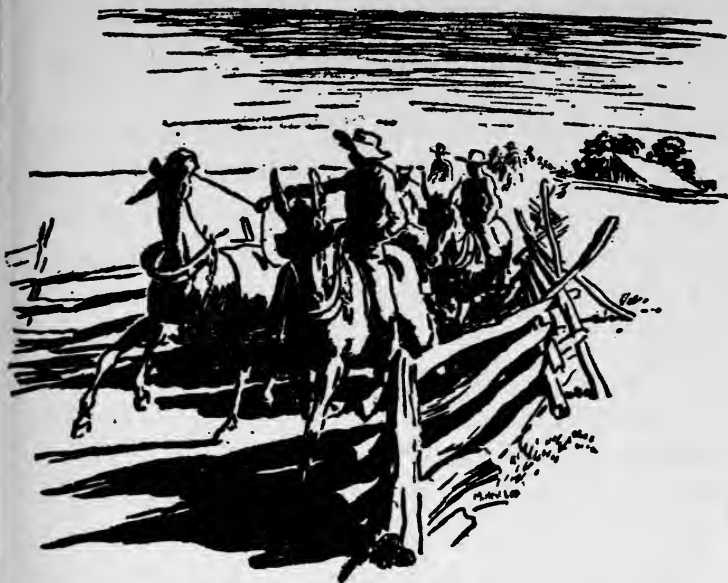
"Who wants to go to the lot with me?" asked Uncle Louis presently, when he could get a word in edgewise.

"Me, me!" called Van. "Me too," said Sally, so they started at once down the lane to the big barn lot. Here Uncle Louis lifted the children to the top of one of the split-rail fences which crawled zigzag across in several directions, and they stared excitedly around.

Baby calves crowded close to the bars of the cow lot, calling "Ma-a-a" as their mothers, bells a-tinkle, ambled out to graze. Beautiful horses pranced and danced off down the lane to their pasture, with an old darkey in their midst.

Many fine sleek mules champed on their corn and hay, shook their long ears to keep off the flies, and now and then gave a playful kick or cross nip at each other. One of them suddenly gave such a loud "he-haw" that Van nearly tumbled off his perch! There were many darkies too! Big black strapping fellows who laughed and talked as they worked lazily. Some tossed ears of corn in the dugout log troughs and filled the feeding racks with hay; others curried and harnessed the mules. They called cheerfully to Uncle Louis and the children.

"Mornin' boys," called back Uncle Louis. "Get



a move on you! Time you were plowing right now. Look at that sun!" And soon, with jingling chains and loud shouts, away they rode to the long day's work in the field.

"Just like a circus parade," said Sally, as Uncle Louis jumped her to the ground. "I wish I could go, too." Van had already scrambled down and was over in one of the sheds, where he found a grindstone, some old wheel rims, and so many other treasures that he would not leave when Uncle Louis called:

"Come on, I've got something fine to show you!"

"I want awfully to climb up that hayrack, but I reckon I can wait," thought Sally, with a longing backward look, as she trailed after her uncle; past the cow lot, which was almost like a small pasture; past the big corn crib on stilts; past the old barn, and into the carriage room of the new barn. Here she saw the carriage which had brought them out to the plantation. She saw Uncle Louis's high buggy and the small two-wheel sulky he used for breaking in the young colts. She saw Aunty's low swung phaëton with the fringed canopy top and soft dark blue cushions.

Then she spied, amid harness, bridles, and saddles on the wall, a small side saddle with scarlet pad and shiny stirrup. Whose could it be? But before she could ask, Uncle Louis took down a bridle and that very saddle and hurried out again. Sally's eyes nearly popped out of her head.

"What are you going to do with those, Uncle Louis?" she called, running to catch up with him. At the old log barn he gave a whistle and opened a door. Sally hastily poked her head inside, but she could see nothing, for only a faint light crept in through the chinks between the logs. Then from the

dusky shadows came a small head, and a soft velvet nose thrust itself right in Sally's face.

"Come out, Daisy, old girl," said Uncle Louis, and out stepped the prettiest pony any child ever saw! Not a Shetland pony, but a real horse, though a very small one. She was brown with a white spot in her forehead, white forefeet, and a long wavy mane. Her tail almost touched the ground. She nickered with pleasure and sniffed up Uncle Louis's sleeve, then in his pockets.

"She's hunting for sugar, Sally," he said. "Give her this."

To Sally's great joy, Daisy took the proffered lump of brown sugar from her hand as daintily as a fine lady, and then began nosing her for more.

"Why, you're friends already," exclaimed Uncle Louis. "That's just fine! Come on, Daisy, get your clothes on!"

And almost before she could say "scat" Sally was in the saddle, holding the reins in her very own hands. Somehow she couldn't believe it was real. Surely she must be dreaming! But dreams always stop at just the nicest place, and this kept right on. Uncle Louis started off, Daisy followed; then a loud and unmistakably real sound brought Sally back to

earth. There was nothing dream-like about Van's voice, lifted in distress as he spied them passing his shed and ran after them.

"I want—I wa-a-n-t—" he wailed, "I want to ride on a horsy. I do-oo!" His sister's heart almost melted to tears, too.

"Oh, Uncle Louis, do please let him get up! Come, precious boy!"

Thus it was that Aunty saw Daisy come pacing up the lane, bearing two beaming children. Sally's cheeks were crimson, and her dark curls bobbed about wildly, but she sat straight in the saddle, handling the lines like an old stager. Van was on behind, holding on for dear life, his short legs sticking straight out on each side over Daisy's fat back.

Aunty exclaimed so delightedly that black faces came popping out from all directions. Dilsey, the cook, took her hands right out of the bread dough, and little Dilsey darted from behind the kitchen, swinging a half-picked chicken by the leg! Sol, the yard boy, dropped his armful of stove wood and sprang behind the riders just in time to catch Van as he slid off over Daisy's tail. Betsy waved her duster wildly from the upstairs window, and even dignified Thomas, the head servant, hurried over from the smoke house to see the fun.

Sally pulled up in great style before the assembled household and then promptly tumbled off herself! But she scrambled on again in a moment amid cheers, while Van demanded:

"Put me back, put me back, quick, I tell you!"

"They are sure-enough Lyles, all right," announced Uncle Louis proudly. "Town hasn't spoiled them one bit. They take to a horse just like a duck takes to water."

"Dey sho' acks jes' lak dey wuz bred en bawn on de plantation," said Dilsey approvingly, and the others murmured assent.

The magic of that morning! Sally and Van rode and rode and rode. In the yard, down the lane, and back again, to and fro, up and down. Lou trotted alongside to see that all went well. Van slipped off now and then, but it didn't hurt, and Lou quickly lifted him back.

Even after he was satisfied and ran off to play with his puppy, Sally refused to get off. Finally Auntie had to coax her in to dinner, and Daisy was hustled off to the pasture in double-quick time for a little needed rest.

That afternoon, when nap time was over, Auntie said: "Lou, you can take the children on down to see

Aunt Dilsey," then explained: "She was the cook here at the big house when your father was a little boy, Sally, but she is too old to work much now."

"Oh, yes, I know, Auntie," said Sally. "Father sent her a present. I'll get it, and we'll go right away."

At the servants' quarters down the lane a little piece, old Aunt Dilsey sat smoking her pipe at her cabin door. She was all dressed up in her best calico and gayest head handkerchief in honor of her white folks' children. As they came down the lane a small darky, posted out in front to watch, spied them first and called:

"Heah dey comes, heah dey comes!" and the house servants, who also rested awhile in the afternoon, hurried out, all grinning broadly, all exclaiming in admiration.

Lou was filled with the importance of her position, and Van and Sally smiled graciously at their new friends. Sally presented her gift.

"Here's a present Father sent you, Aunt Dilsey, with his love. He said to tell you nobody in the world made good ginger cakes like yours."

Aunt Dilsey chuckled as she held up the fine white apron for the other darkies to admire.

"Now, ain't dat jes' like Mars' Will. He sho' was er master hand fer ginger cakes. I done switched he's

legs many er time, twell he hop roun' like er hopper-grass, 'ca'se he was allus trackin' up my kitchen flo'. But, Lawsy, he ain't nebber go way 'dout dem cakes, switchin' er no switchin'."

Sally and Van giggled, and then Dilsey said:

"Nemmine, Dilsey's gwine ter make *dese* chilluns some ginger cakes, en she'll let 'em roas' 'taters in de ashes, too."

"I'se gwine ter flute de ruffles on yo' ap'ons till yo' look like er flyin' angel en let yo' he'p churn de butter," called Lucy, who did the washing and took care of the milk.

"I knows a pow'ful lot er tales," rejoined old Aunt Dilsey, not to be outdone by her youngers.

"Are *all* these your children, Aunt Dilsey?" Sally presently wanted to know, but when they tried to explain she was so mixed up that the darkies all laughed heartily and Aunt Dilsey added:

"Law, chile, dese ain't hardly none o' my 'scend-ents!"

When the visit was over, the children walked slowly back to the house. Sally climbed up on the plank fence which enclosed the hard, clean-swept yard, shaded by great water oaks. She looked all around, then over into the blossoming orchard and down into the grove.

"Gracious, Lou!" she exclaimed. "This sure is a big place! What are all those houses?" And Lou pointed out the kitchen, and the smoke house, and the chicken house, and the woodshed, and the milk house, until Sally's head fairly whirled. A row of boxes on top of the fence in one corner of the yard next caught her eye.

"What are those boxes, Lou?" she asked, but Lou and Van had strolled on, so Sally went to find out for herself. She climbed on the fence and peeped around into the end box. Out popped the head of a very angry hen, feathers all fluffed out, and she pecked Sally exactly on her turned up little nose! It was a hard peck, too. Sally tumbled off the fence in a hurry, holding a bloody nose, and the hen fussed and clucked disgustedly at being disturbed while she was trying to hatch her eggs.

Sally nearly cried, but not quite. She picked herself up from the ground and started to find Lou and Van. She didn't just then, however, for on the other side of a tall boxwood hedge came whoops and calls!

"Quit dat scratchin' up mistis' flowers, yo' or'nary triffin' mean critters! Haste yo'sef out er dis front yard fo' I licks de stuffin' out er yo'! Shoo-shoo-oo-oo!" followed by wild cackles and squawks and sounds of rushing here and there.

Sally ran close to the hedge and was trying her hardest to peep through the thick greenery when over her head flew the big white rooster and under her feet scuttled several agitated hens!

Down went Sally again, the rooster flopping on top, the hens beneath, and a moment later the puppy joined in the fray. Sol's startled face appeared above the hedge, but he could only keep yelling, and poor Sally had rather a bad time of it till Lou came to her rescue. The excited chickens squawked worse than ever as they ran away, while all the others in the yard cackled in sympathy.

Lou led crestfallen, scratched Sally to the well and, with murmurs of sympathy, washed her face and hands in the cool water of the chicken trough.

Van hugged her and promised valiantly: "I won't let the bad chickies get you any more, Sister," so her ruffled feelings were soothed.

When Lou took them into the front yard on the other side of the hedge, Sally quite forgot her troubles, for a wistaria vine trailed over an arbor, then climbed, with its purple blossoms, to the very top of the roof, and the many brick-bordered flower beds were full of violets, yellow daffodils, and purple flags. All about were clumps of burning bush, golden bell, and snow-white bridal wreath. The children

paused for a moment to look; then they spied a great magnolia tree with low branches sweeping the ground and ran to climb it.

"I can see the top of the yellow jasmine vine over on that cedar tree. Oh, oh, there are some darling humming birds having their supper up there!" chanted Sally from a high perch.

"An' I can see on top of the porch, Lou," called Van from his lower limb.

"I *do* believe there's a bird's nest in the vine on the porch," added Sally, peering down. "Yes, there is, but I can't see any eggs. And just listen, Brother, to those birds singing down in the grove!"

"Maybe it's their nest, Sister," said Van. "Let's watch an' see!"

The sun was going down behind the trees that evening when a very tired little boy and girl sat down on the stile which led to the grove in front of the house. They looked quietly at their new home. They saw a big white rambling old house framed with high clipped hedges. It had green shutters and wide verandas covered with climbing roses and vines. The spring air was soft and full of delicious smells. The children sniffed contentedly.

"I *do* like this place," said Van softly, cuddling his head on his sister's shoulder.

Sally put her arm around her little brother.

"So do I," she said. "Let's send for Mother and Father and Mammy and stay here always."

They sat very still, till the sun was gone and till the shadows began to grow deeper; till Aunty's voice came through the window with some question about her babies to Lou. Then, hand in hand, they walked up the long brick walk—now a lovely dim lane of white and gold and pale green—into the welcoming house.

CHAPTER III

THE BOYS COME OVER

AUNTY," said Sally, as they were feeding the chickens one morning, "I do believe this is the most scrumptious place in the world!"

For each day new things kept popping up! There were baby chickens, calves, colts, and pigs; hungry cottontails came hopping into the garden and all about; and many birds were singing, or nesting, or teaching their children how to fly.

Then there was so much to do every moment that Sally had a great time catching up. She sat in awed admiration on the haircloth sofa in the parlor and gazed around at the family portraits, the glittering chandelier with its hundreds of prisms, the white marble mantelpiece, and the whatnot loaded with small treasures.

She went with Thomas into the smoke house, where he let her put hickory chips on the fire which smoldered in the open brick fire box, or tell him which ham to cut down for dinner. She tagged after Aunty into the storerooms, pantry, and milk house, and she

couldn't bear to see Uncle Louis ride off to the fields without her!

And long before she had made the rounds the kinsfolk and friends began flocking over to White Hills to see the newcomers. Pretty Aunt Julia, who lived on the next plantation, came first, with John, Jr., and Henry.

"I'm ashamed of them, Sister," she said plaintively. "They would come barefooted. They won't even put on their shoes and stockings for Sunday school, and I can't do a thing with them."

Her sons scowled at her, made faces at Sally and Van, then rushed off, turning somersaults and hand-springs before their astonished cousins, who followed and soon tried to do likewise.

Cousin Elsie brought Jack and Neal Patton and Eddie; Cousin Sam rode over with Lyle and Winship; and still they kept coming.

"Goodness gracious, Aunty," exclaimed Sally in dismay, "isn't there anything but boys in this family?"

"Why, darling, I hadn't thought of it, but I don't believe there is a girl anywhere near your age except Jennie's Bess. She has three brothers, and they will be out soon, and the Dillon children—but I declare, they are all boys too. Why, it's too bad! We will

have to see if we can't find someone for you." Then she added: "Just now I am going to write to your mother—suppose you get a letter ready to go too."

So Sally, whose pencil could fly almost as fast as her tongue, scribbled eagerly:

DEAREST MOTHER:

My pony's name is Daisy and we have named the puppy Reddy. He is so cute and he got in the house yesterday and chewed up Aunty's stocking basket and one of Uncle Louis' shoes so he can't come in any more, which makes him cry when we leave him outside.

Alex has put up two swings down in the grove and we play there while Uncle Louis takes his nap. I can pump way up high. There is a big high stump too and when he has time, Alex is going to fix us a flying-ginney. Then down further in the grove there are grapevine swings. Lou says the Lord put them up, but I think the fairies must have helped, for this is *their* part of the grove.

Auntie has lots of servants, but they are all busy for this is a busy place. Thomas is the bossiest and he makes everyone on the plantation step around except Auntie. Uncle Louis says he never could call his soul his own. Because Thomas was his body servant

from the time they were babies before the war and he always had to do what Thomas said, which is partly a joke, I reckon, but partly true because Thomas won't give him any more desert and is always reminding him what to do. Thomas talks like grandfather Lyle not like the other darkies.

They all say "Marster" and "Mistis" down here even if they are not slaves any more. They just can't get used to *not* saying it, yet. Old Aunt Dilsey says anyway she's no free nigger and never will be, and nobody can make her be and she dares anyone to try it!

Lou is our nurse and we like her, but she is very particular and tries to make me wear my sun bonnet so I won't get freckles, just like Mammy does. She wraps her hair with white strings in a heap of little pigtails to make it longer and so does lil' Dilsey, but Betsy won't do it. She says the Lord gave her short kinky wool and its good enough for her like it is.

We sure have got a heap of kin-folks. Thomas says its because Grandfather had a heap of brothers and sisters and most of them had a heap of children and so did they and they nearly all live round here. So we are kin to everybody and they all come over to see us. All the grown-ups pet us. Uncle Will says my dimples and eyelashes will catch me a beau as quick as a wink when I'm a young lady, and Aunt Julia

says she thinks its wonderful I can read *David Copperfield* when John Jr. can't hardly read in the second reader, and everyone owns up Brother is the most beautiful child in the family.

But Mother, there are about a million boys in this family and they are perfectly awful! They gave Brother some little fat worms out of hickory nuts and told him they were goodies and to eat them. I slapped two of their faces good and they chased me, but I could out-run them so they didn't catch me. Their names are Henry and John Jr. and they are the baddest of the lot. They come over here the most for they don't go to school but just have lessons at home sometimes, but not very often. The other boys are bad enough too. I can't tell Aunty on them tho, for that's being a sneaky Tattletale. Lou says to talk back and play tricks on them too and she will help us if they pick on me and Brother so we'll be all right.

Mother, the kitchen is outdoors here. Lou says the quality white folks always have their kitchen outside of the house, so I did not tell her our kitchen is in the house for fear she might think we are po' white trash.

Hugs and kisses,

SALLY.

But the boys kept coming over to White Hills, and there being nothing else to do, Sally resigned herself to her fate. By and by she was quite cheerful about it. Van, however, wept often and much because his beloved sister and the boys ran away from him. Lou went around with her mouth stuck out; she didn't like the boys either. As for Uncle Louis, he said with some heat:

"Honestly, Rose, you ought to put your foot down on these doings right now," but Auntie refused to get excited.

"Oh, Sally will settle down pretty soon," she said placidly, and put the turpentine bottle and a roll of bandages on a convenient shelf.

"Jes' look at dat chile," murmured old Aunt Dilsey from her cabin door watch post, as Sally, shrieking wildly, fled down the lane, John, Jr., and Henry in hot pursuit.

"Miss Jule say she can't keep dem boys o' her'n at home nohow since Miss Sally come," said Betsy. "Dey sho' am makin' er tomboy outen her, en her sich er nice li'l' lady at fust." Then added: "Mars' Louis sho' am mad, en I don't blame 'im."

For Uncle Louis, with a very red face, came by from the lot, saying in a loud, angry voice:

"Somebody's left the bars down in the horse lot,

and the colts are all out. Goodness knows where. I'd just like to know who did it!"

A little later old Uncle Tom, who took care of the horses, came up to the big house with three wet, battered youngsters.

"Mistis," he complained, "jes' look heah. Dey stomped and stomped till dey broke de big hayrack en fell down in de hosses' water. Dey gwine ter git kilt if dey don't 'have deyse'f." And he shuffled off grumbling while Lou sniffed with scorn as she led Sally off to repair some of the damage.

When their wounds had been bandaged and their feelings soothed with a ginger cake apiece, Sally and the boys sat on a log in the orchard.

"What'll we do?" asked John, Jr.

Sally, who was wiggling her toes in the soft grass, squealed out: "Oh, I cut my toe"; then picked up a small, sparkly piece of stone, shaped to a point at one end with a notch on each side of the other.

"Look here," she said. "What is this?"

"Why, that's nothin' but a Indian arrowhead," said John, Jr. "I've found lots of 'em."

"How did it get here?" asked Sally, her eyes growing big. "Are there any Indians around here?"

"Course not now, silly," began Henry; then

shouted: "Oh, I know! Let's play Indians an' scalp the palefaces an' fight!"

"We'll have to make some bows and arrows first," said John, Jr., so the boys went after hickory switches, and Sally came back to the house.

"Aunty, we want some string and some scraps of red calico, and some needles and thread, please, ma'am, right quick," said she.

Aunty gave all these and offered more, if they would let Van play with them, so peace fell upon the frazzled household for a time.

Henry made the bows, and John, Jr., notched and sharpened the arrows; Van picked up chicken feathers; Sally tied a feather on each arrow to make it fly farther, while Lou, relenting somewhat, made the headdresses for them.

"Oh, dear," said Sally, "I do wish our feathers were colored too."

"Unc' Cæsar was paintin' a wagon in the shed the other day," said John, Jr. "Let's go see if there was any paint left, Sally." They spied a paint bucket on a high ledge, and John, Jr., clambered up to investigate, Sally, underneath, pushing him vigorously. He almost made it. Then, with a crash, down came boy, bucket, and all, the bucket landing ex-

actly upside down on Sally's head, fitting as neatly as a cap! John, Jr., scrambled up, helped pull it off, and did his best with corn shucks, but Sally's curls were emerald green, and no Indian chief could have had finer face decoration.

Aunty and Betsy worked hard and long with turpentine, but to no avail, and there was nothing to do but use the big shears.

After it was all over Sally cuddled down on Uncle Louis's lap.

"Well, I am kinder glad," she said bravely, touching her shorn head, "Curls are a heap of trouble, and you know, Uncle Louis, they *are* dangerous some times." Uncle Louis looked a bit bewildered, so she explained.

"Why don't you remember about Absalom in the Bible, how his curls got caught in the tree branches and pulled him off his horse, so he was hung up there? And, anyway, mine'll grow back an' nobody'll mind, but maybe Father and Mammy——" Here the tears came with a burst, and Uncle Louis's shirt front was pretty damp before the shower was over. But after the first shock it really was a comfort, her head felt so cool and light; so Sally returned blithely to important Indian affairs.

On the top plank of the back fence the reunited

chiefs, brave in feather headdress and other adornments, sat in conclave.

"Now," said Henry, "we can go to fighting and scalping."

"Who'll we scalp?" asked John, Jr.

This was a poser. Here were only chiefs. Braves, squaws, palefaces—all were needed. But where were they? Henry looked at Sally.

"You'll have to be a squaw, Sally, and stay at home and cook for the braves," said he.

"Yes," John, Jr., agreed, "course you *can't* be a chief. You're only a girl."

Up went Sally's head.

"I'll show you whether I'll be a chief or not," she said. "And girls are *always* smarter and braver than boys. I didn't cry when we fell through the hayrack, and both of you big babies did. And when Uncle Louis asked who let the colts out, who was afraid to own up? Not me—Ya-ya-ya!" Then, quick as a flash, over went Henry, backward tumbled John, Jr.—arms and legs sprawling out, feathers flying off—to disappear in a big pile of leaves which Sol had just swept up, ready to burn.

"Ho, ho, ho!" shouted Sally, "little Injuns run; big Injun chief catch um!" as she landed on top of the confused pair. Finally they scrambled up and

gave her a good ducking in the leaves; but when all three, covered with sticks and leaves, sat breathless on the ground, Sally boasted without further contradiction:

"I am a great and powerful Indian chief." This settled, the chiefs came back to business.

"Van can be a brave, I reckon," said Henry doubtfully, "if he won't cry."

"And Sol, if Auntie will let him stop sweeping the yard," added John, Jr. "I wish some of the other fellows would come over to-day."

Sally had a sudden inspiration.

"Oh, boys, I know what! We'll go down to the quarters and get all the children. There are just about a million of 'em, Ike and Minnie and 'Zekiel and Mandy and Billy and Alex! And all Fanny's babies for papooses! Oh, goody, goody, goody!"

Up she jumped and danced about so wildly with joy at such plenty that the boys began hopping around too.

Lou's family, who made a crop together on shares with Uncle Louis, lived down at the old slave quarters. Here the children, clean and well brought up little darkies, gathered quickly, as Sally and the boys came dashing down the lane.

Sally lined her small black friends against the

picket fence, and they were counted out—braves, squaws, and papooses, a goodly company for each chief. Then they hurried to the piney woods end of the grove, with its hillocks, ravines, and soft carpet of brown needles.

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Soon blood-curdling war whoops announced that the Indians had returned to their old hunting ground in the land of their fathers, where they tarried for some time. Others speedily joined the original band as the word passed round by what Uncle Louis called "the grapevine route."

A village of wigwams sprang up overnight, as a portion of the back rail fence and some cotton bagging from the shed disappeared. Braves went out hunting, game was cooked over the camp fire, but when the paleface lady at the big house sent down a basket of ginger cakes, biscuits, and hard-boiled eggs, it was not despised. The peace pipe was solemnly smoked, and the fighting went on again.

By and by Aunty said:

"Betsy, have you seen any hawks around? I hear the chickens a good deal of late, and they seem quite excited." Then she exclaimed: "Why, Betsy, what is the matter with those roosters! They look all one-sided and bedraggled. We'd better dose them."

Betsy grinned.

"Tain't nothin' de matter, mistis, but dem chil-luns pullin' out de po' critter's fadders fer ter play Injun. Dat's what make 'em squawk so much."

And Dilsey said:

"En, mistis, dey's done pulled mighty nigh all my ol' turkey gobbler's tail fadders out, en I axes yo', please, ma'am, ter make 'em quit."

"Yes, ma'am," said Sally, when Auntie asked about it, "we did, but we didn't know it mattered. The roosters and gobblers had so *many* feathers we thought they didn't need 'em all. We've got all we want now."

So the chickens and turkeys settled down and kept their remaining feathers, and presently the Indians disappeared before a cowboy assault.

"What dem chilluns up to now!" exclaimed Aunt Dilsey, as a new commotion passed down the lane. "Yonder go Mars' Louis on a run ter de hog pasture atter dat Henry— Sol en my Tom wid 'im."

Down at the pasture Uncle Louis found there was no time to be lost, for his prize hog was choking and gasping, a slip noose round its neck, with John, Jr., tugging at the other end of the rope. And close by, waist deep in the mud of the hog pool, was Sally:

"I can't slip this rope loose!" wailed John, Jr.

"I can't get loose out of here!" wept Sally.



When the hog had been released and Sally towed out by the rope the boys tried to explain.

"We was playin' cowboys an' lassooin' the hogs instead of cows, 'cause they don't run so fast," began Don.

"An' Sally was a white captive runnin' away from the Indians, and she played that ol' hog was a horse," went on Eddie.

"Then the mean old thing ran right out in the pool and rubbed me off in the mud where the hogs wallowed," interrupted Sally, tearful again.

"Then I tried to lasso him, an' I *did!*"—John, Jr., could not keep the pride out of his voice—"but he kept rollin' round in the pool and pullin' the noose tighter——" but here Uncle Louis's wrath burst forth, and the boys ducked, dodged, and went scooting for their horses. By the time he got back to the house with Sally, now sneezing and shivering, they were gone.

After she was dosed and tucked in a warm bed Uncle Louis said to Aunty.

"Now, honey, I tell you, all this carrying-on has got to stop, or there won't be a thing left on this plantation"; and Aunty agreed that somebody's foot was needed.

The next morning she was all ready to put hers down good and hard, but Sally was nowhere to be seen.

"Where is Sally?" she said anxiously to Dilsey, who chuckled.

"Dat chile jes' like a flea, she hop roun' so lively. Heah she am, en da she am, en den she gone plum outer sight. Yo' can't put yer finger on 'er no-how." But this time she was wrong, for Aunty found Sally helping Betsy beat up the feather beds and smooth on the gay patchwork quilts in a most housewifely manner. Presently, in fresh pink gingham apron.

she came quietly out on the porch where Aunty was mending.

"Could I help you with my stockings, Aunty?" she asked. "Seems like I've been pretty hard on 'em down here."

Aunty accepted with pleasure, and soon they were chatting cozily, as they sewed, without reference to unpleasant matters.

"Why do we call this place White Hills, Aunty?" asked Sally. "Is it because of all this white dogwood and the plum blossoms?"

"No, dear, your grandmother named it," explained Aunty. "She was a city girl, just seventeen, when your grandfather married her and brought her down here from Kentucky. They drove all the way in their own carriage and reached here just at cotton-picking time. When she looked out from this very veranda, over all these hills, covered with snow-white cotton, she clapped her hands like a little girl and cried to her husband:

"'Oh, the lovely white hills! Are they really ours, Mr. Lyle?' and when he answered, 'Yes,' she said softly:

"'White Hills—White Hills, our own dear home!' She loved it here, and she made White Hills a very happy home."

"Just like you do, Aunty," said Sally, hugging her lovingly. "That's a sweet tale, and I think she was a very sweet little grandmother."

"If you'd like to read some of her diaries and letters," added Aunty, "you can look in the end desk of the writing table. There, that's my last patch. Roll these stockings up neatly now, Sally, and we will be all through."

When Uncle Louis came in to dinner, Sally was at Grandmother's desk, poring over some old papers, launched on a perfect orgy of reading. When the boys strayed back she was too absorbed to look at them, and the household at White Hills drew a deep breath. Indeed, for a time she was so sedate that Uncle Louis said:

"Seems to me, Rose, things are a little dull round here."

But Aunty replied gratefully:

"Thank heaven, yes, they *are*."

CHAPTER IV

MUCH ADO ABOUT RICHARD

TO SALLY'S lasting regret, she and Van were in bed and asleep when the new excitement came. Aunty was busy in her room, and Uncle Louis was reading his paper in the sitting room.

Someone tapped at the back door, and Thomas opened it. The light from the swinging oil lamp in the hall fell full upon a face which seemed suddenly to form out of the darkness. Thomas gave one look, and then, ashy gray, he stumbled into the sitting room. He could hardly speak.

"Mars' Louis!" he called feebly.

"Why, Thomas, what's the matter?" exclaimed Uncle Louis.

"For the Lord's sake, Mars' Louis, come quick—Mars' Richard's ghost!" half whispered Thomas.

Uncle Louis sprang to his feet and was at the door in a moment.

"What's this nonsense?" he began; then he too was speechless. For there stood a tall scarecrow of a boy dressed in homespun breeches far too big for his thin

legs, and a tattered dirty shirt. His black hair was long and matted, but his face, drawn and grimy as it was, was the face of Uncle Louis's young brother, Richard, who had gone gayly off to war sixteen years ago and had never come back.

Who, who indeed was this?

Uncle Louis's head whirled for a moment, and he leaned against the door heavily. Then he heard in the mountaineer drawl:

"Howdy. I'm a-lookin' fur some folks by the name o' Lyle."

Uncle Louis was himself again.

"You've found them. Come right in and tell me about things," he said quickly. But he saw in a moment that this was no time for talk.

He helped the boy to sit down. Thomas, partly recovered, hurried for wine and biscuits; then Uncle Louis went to Aunty.

"Rose, a queer thing has happened. Come help us see what to do first."

Aunty went, and things were quickly settled.

By and by Thomas came back to the sitting room, tears on his black cheeks. He was still upset.

"He's all clean and sound asleep, Mars' Louis, and he's Mars' Richard's own self. You and mistis come and see."

They went upstairs together and looked down at the sleeping boy. With the grime and strain gone, a faint color in his cheeks, his dark head flung easily back on the pillow, he might well have been the loved young brother of the years when Uncle Louis and Thomas, too, were young and gay, when the war shadow was no larger than a man's hand and still a long ways off.

The next morning Richard waked in utter bewilderment. He was lying on a big soft feather bed in the largest, grandest room he had ever seen in his life. He thought perhaps he had died, for his body felt dull and lifeless, and he couldn't remember anything. Then the door opened and in came the black man who had been so good to him the night before.

"Good-morning, Mars' Richard. I am Thomas," he said. "Here's some breakfast and some clothes for you, and I'll be back after awhile."

A little later Richard followed Thomas down to the sitting room, where Uncle Louis and Aunty asked questions and listened eagerly, watching the boy closely as he talked.

Soon he had told all he knew or had heard of himself, and why he had come. His name was Richard Lyle, and he was named for his own father. His mother had told him this, and Jim Bond, his step-

father, said so, too. He thought he was thirteen years old, but he didn't know his birthday. He had always lived in the mountains, but he did not know where he was born. They had moved so many times. He did not know the name of his mother's folks, nor where they lived. No, he didn't remember his father at all, but he did remember his mother a little. She used to tell him he must learn his books and never tell a lie and never shame his father's folks, who were very grand and owned more niggers than anybody could count. He used to wonder what a nigger was, for he never had seen one.

"Humph!" said Uncle Louis, as he banged the door shut on a slow black-faced parade which kept passing and repassing the sitting room, "you can't ever say that again, young man. Everyone of 'em on this place seems to have business right here now. Go on."

So Richard took up his tale again.

He had been a little boy when his mother had died of fever. After a while Jim, his stepfather, and Minnie were married. Jim had built a cabin up on the ridge, and there they had lived till Minnie died and the fire burned them out. He and Jim had come to Birmingham; then Richard, because he was not wanted there, had started out to find his kinsfolk, asking his way and working for food and shelter when he

could. Somehow he had got to White Hills, and here he was! That was all his story.

"What do you want to do, my boy?" asked Uncle Louis finally, when it was clear there was nothing more to be learned.

"I want to git some more book larnin' and a place to stay," answered Richard.

"Well, you need a rest first, anyway, and I'll have to find out more about all this, Richard, so we will wait a few days to make our plans," said Uncle Louis, as he rose, looked at his watch, and hastily flung open the door. And he all but fell on top of his entire household. For there they were: Sally, Van, Lou, Dilsey, Betsy, little Dilsey, even Thomas—hovering on the outskirts—all listening eagerly and caught in the act! But only for a second!

"What!" exploded Uncle Louis, his face as red as a beet. "What——" Then he saw that, except for Sally and Van, he was raging at the empty hall!

Sally giggled.

"Now, Uncle Louis, don't get so mad. We are all just about to pop open; you talked in there so long. Where *is* that boy?" Then she stared at Richard.

Richard stared back in good earnest, first at her, then at Van, who clung to his sister's hand. However did *they* get here!

But the children were all unaware of his thoughts, for Sally had had only a glimpse of a ragged dirty boy on the station platform the day she had left home, while Van didn't remember him at all.

Richard said nothing but "Howdy" when Aunty introduced them, and nothing more when they took him out to see the place, as they promptly insisted upon doing.

Soon the news of Richard's coming went round, and relations, friends, and old family servants came hurrying over to White Hills. When they saw this strange new Richard the ladies all cried and the men cleared their throats or turned their heads away quickly, while the darkies exclaimed: "Young Mars' Richard, sho' nuff!"

The family began at once to search for the facts about this boy with their kinsman's face and name, who had stepped so mysteriously out of the darkness. First they looked over all the old war letters and papers but found nothing there to help them at all.

The war between the states had been going on a little more than three years when their Richard had celebrated his eighteenth birthday. He had been waiting impatiently to enlist, so on that very day he had ridden off with his bodyservant, Scipio, to join the Southern army.

A few months later, after a battle fought in the mountains, had come that dread report:

"Killed in action. Missing."

His comrades, almost to a man, had been lost in the hottest of the fighting, and most of them lay in unnamed graves; for the Confederates were driven far away from the battle grounds and could not recover their wounded and dead. Scipio was never seen after the battle. Other Negroes around the camp said he had run away to the Yankees, but no one knew.

The family had been unable to find out anything more then, and they had no better luck now, for there was no one left to tell of the young soldier's life in the mountain camp during those last troubled months before the fall of the Confederacy, when almost anything might have happened.

The search for Richard's mountain kin proved just as fruitless. Advertisements brought no replies. Jim was gone—no one knew where, while the forest fire which had swept the ridge had driven all who might know anything of value back into remoter sections of the mountains.

At last it seemed that the only hope was in some of the mountain traveling preachers and they had not been located as yet. By and by Uncle Louis talked again with Richard.

"We are doing all we can to get at the truth, my boy. Maybe we never will; but anyway, you can live with us and go to school. We are poor down here in spite of all the Negroes and land—because of them, really. So you'll have to work and help make your way. Do you want to try?"

"Yes, I 'low I do," said Richard, looking straight into Uncle Louis's eyes.

"I reckon you'd better begin right away with your studies. How far have you gone?"

"Not fur—I hain't had much chanc't. I'm a good reader—Preacher Lee said I was—an' good at figgerin', but that's all."

"Well, that's a fine start," said Uncle Louis encouragingly, "but we won't try school till you get evened up with the other boys. To-day we'll go talk it over with Dr. Barnes, our minister, and then we'll all help out. How does that suit you?"

"Hit's all right," said Richard. He did not know how much all this meant, nor even that he should say, "Thank you," but he did add at once:

"What'll I do to pay fur hit?"

Uncle Louis liked that.

"You can begin work to-morrow. Go down to the lot early every morning and in the evening and help Uncle Tom with the horses. He'll tell you what to do.

This can go on your living. You'll be busy with your books later in the mornings, but I'll pay you for all the extra work you have time for, and you can buy your clothes yourself after you get started."

So the matter rested.

Family tongues buzzed and buzzed again, this time in disbelief. Indeed, it did all seem preposterous. As Cousin Jennie said:

"How could this boy who is just thirteen be his son, when our Richard was killed in a battle fought nearly three years before the child was born?"

"He is the image of Richard, but those accidental likenesses do sometimes happen, and the boy could easily have picked up the name and be using it," added Cousin Will.

"Well, anyway, I think Louis and Rose are *very* foolish to take a boy like that into their home. There is no telling what he'll do," said Cousin Jennie, and everyone agreed with her.

But though others doubted or questioned or disbelieved, there were two people who felt sure that a true son of the Lyle family had come home.

Thomas, for all his fine manners, believed firmly in ghosts. Afterward, in telling about Richard's coming, he declared that when he opened the door he saw Mars' Richard's ha'nt standing close behind the

boy with both arms around him. He never wavered in this belief, and he treated Richard with great respect and made the other servants say, "Young Mars' Richard," when they spoke to him.

As for Sally, she had many explanations, a new one every day, but all perfectly satisfactory to her, and she always spoke of him as *our cousin Richard*, with great firmness, to everyone. Sally was indeed thrilled beyond measure at the whole affair.

"It's the very most interesting thing I ever did have happen," she said to Aunty; "just exactly like we were all in a story about changelings and lost heirs. The only thing left out is that Jim didn't teach Richard to steal and beat him like in *Great Expectations*. I don't see why he didn't."

"Why, Sally, how can you think of such things?" said Aunty. But Sally was off again.

"I can just see him now, poor Uncle Richard, crawling through the rain of bullets, with one in his head, trying to get to his beautiful mountain bride before he dropped!"

"Sally," said Aunty sternly, "if you say anything like that around your uncle, I will punish you severely."

"Well, I won't, Aunty. I wonder why can't *I* have something happen to me." Then hopefully;

"Maybe I will. Maybe the next time the Indians come to sell baskets they'll steal me and dress me in rags and make me tell fortunes. Then maybe you'll come by, Aunty, and not know me and——"

"Sally!" exclaimed her aunt, this time really upset. "What in the world *have* you been reading! If you don't stop all this nonsense, I'll shut you in the attic and keep you there safely till your father comes for you."

"Like the Prisoner of Chillon," went on Sally dreamily. "Would you let me have a mouse to tame, or a tiny weed to grow in my cell, Aunty?"

"I would let you have an arithmetic to study and a slate for sums," said Aunty, her eyes smiling again, "and I will let you have them right this minute," she went on. "Lou, get Miss Sally's school things."

Sally giggled. She was fairly caught, and she knew it, so she went over and hugged Aunty, then went to work on those hated sums.

Presently White Hills settled back to its own placid life once more. And Richard, too, settled into an accepted fact with no more to be said about it.

But, as days passed, the boy began to know that he was a stranger in a far country. At first he thought nothing about it. Indeed, for a while he didn't even notice he was so different or think it mattered if he

were. His ways, thought he, were as good as anybody's.

But by and by he came to be a little uneasy; then to wonder and worry. Everything he did and said seemed wrong. Why, he could not understand, for nothing he had learned in his old life told him what was expected of him here. There he had had no mother or father, no loving black mammy, no aunts, uncles, or cousins—only Jim and Minnie, who were no real kin at all.

The three of them lived in a one-room log cabin which clung to the mountain side. They were very poor, even for mountaineers, with only a cow, a pig or two, a few sheep, and a small clearing of land.

Jim was lazy. He worked in the corn patch when he was obliged to, and went to mill with corn when the meal gave out, but most of the time he loafed or hunted.

Minnie worked much harder; that was the way in the mountains. She spun the wool which she had cut from their sheep, wove it into cloth and made most of their clothes from this. She cooked their food over the open fire and waited until Jim and Richard were through before she ate hers. She helped Jim in the cornfield and brought all their

water from the spring below the cabin and washed their clothes once in a while.

Richard helped around the cabin a little and hunted or fished with Jim.

Once in a while they went to preaching over on another ridge, or down to the crossroad settlement in the valley, where Jim traded corn for tobacco, snuff, and a little calico, and usually got drunk. But most of the time they stayed on the mountain, far away from neighbors or visitors, except for an occasional preacher, trapper, or revenue agent who came their way. They did not talk very much, for there wasn't much to talk about. Minnie and Jim couldn't read, but somehow Richard learned, and he went to school a little. The traveling preachers loaned him a few books and he read everything he could get, over and over.

It was a queer lonely life, but Richard was not unhappy, because he had never known anything else. He loved to hunt and fish and to lie with his book by a crystal clear brook which jumped over the rocks and down the mountain side to the valley. He loved the woods with their mighty trees and could find his way through the deepest forest without getting lost.

He had names for the many beautiful birds and

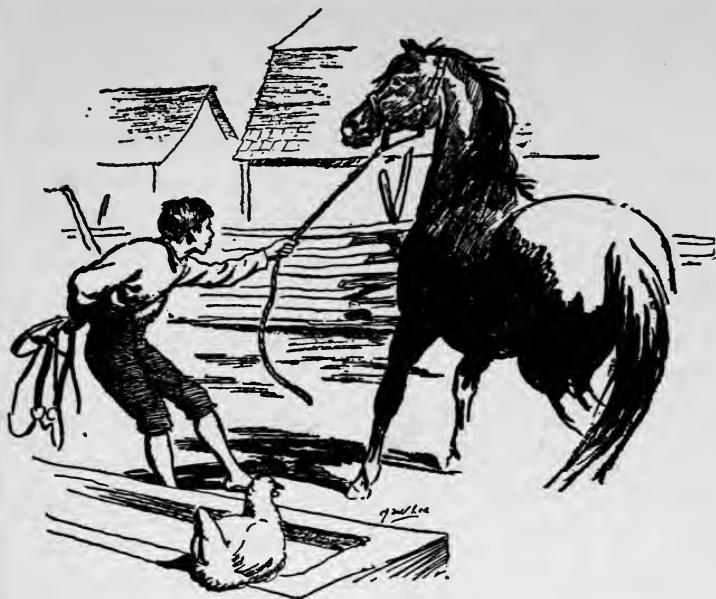
flowers which came in summer time, and he knew where to find healing herbs; also the roots and berries Minnie needed for dye. He could tell all the wood animals by their tracks in the snow. He could catch a brook trout with his hands and shoot a hurrying rabbit a long ways off. So he was wise and skilled in many ways, but they were not the ways of White Hills.

Jim and Minnie and their cabin belonged in one world.

This great house, with its wide fields, many servants, and constant stream of company: these people who were always laughing and talking and kissing each other, who mixed up sense and nonsense, who were angry and then pleased again at once, all belonged in another world. A troubled Richard could find no bridge between the two.

Slowly he also came to see what it meant to be a charity boy taken in out of kindness. In the mountains this would make no difference, but here he found it did. Even the Negroes and the children who came to visit showed this in their manner to him.

His work was a trial, for Richard knew nothing of horses, and he did not have the true horseman's touch. Really, he was a little afraid of them. This the spirited creatures sensed, so they nipped him and re-



fused his guidance and attention in a way that made him seem rough or even unkind to them, much to his distress.

The loss of his own dream of finding someone who really belonged—his very *own* folks—hurt deeply, and now he grew more and more unhappy.

Of course, no one suspected all this or knew what the trouble was. Because of his fierce mountaineer pride and his deep personal reserve he could not ex-

plain things even to his little friend Sally. So he shut his heart tight and seemed to be sullen and stubborn and dull when he was really troubled and sick at heart.

Aunty and Uncle Louis tried to be kind and patient, for they knew things were different, but of just *how* different they had no idea. They too felt troubled and wondered what to do.

CHAPTER V

LETTERS FROM SALLY

MY HONORED PARENTS.

I've got such a heap to tell you I am most bustin open. You see I couldn't write to you while we were getting used to Richard so I am way behind and something keeps coming on to tell about. Auntie says to write some of it every day like a diary, and then send it after a while so I think I will. But not so pious or neat as Grandmother writes. I read some of her diary and letters when she was a girl. She was a much better one than I am but I don't believe she had as good a time but maybe she did.

Auntie says not to tell you all about Richard because you know every bit of it. Anyway he is a nice cousin and truly Uncle Richard's son and I like him even if he does talk funny but he doesn't talk very much. We did have a most exciting time but he is home folks now and not so exciting. Alex got round to the flyin-ginney yestoday and its more fun than *anything*. He put a long pole across that stump and fastened it on with a long spike right in the middle

but real loose so the pole can turn but it can't fly off the stump, then he nailed little cross pieces close to the ends of the pole like a sort of handle to hold on by. You catch on to the end of the pole and push till it gets to going fast and jump on on it quick with your feet off the ground and fly round and round till it stops. Auntie won't let Brother ride on it so we've got a see-saw too. It's a plank across a log and is a heap of fun but the flyin-ginney is the best. I am learning to hold on. I fell off yesterday and skinned my nose—the same one the hen pecked. Uncle Louis says it isn't big enough to spare much more skin.

I ride on Daisy every day and I ride on the little trees in the grove bent over you know and Brother rides on Uncle Louis' fishing pole and plays it is a horse. I am too big to do that.

Your respectful and obedient daughter,

SARAH LYLE.

P. S. 1. That's the way Grandmother signs her letters and I began it the way she did.

P. S. 2. This is Monday and I'll write some more tomorrow. I write mostly after supper, so Uncle Louis can read the papers.

P. S. 3. I forgot to tell you we all work, some of it is for duty and some for pay and some just because

you want to. My duty work is feeding the chickens and gathering the eggs every morning. I like it now but I didn't at first because Aunty's chickens are a heap fiercer than ours at home.

Tuesday:

Oh Mother, I have the finest garden! I have mustard greens and radishes up and I did have some lettuce only I got mixed up when I was pulling weeds and pulled up all the lettuce instead, but I won't do it any more. Richard, Brother and I have a goober patch too. We are all working that, but we have to watch Brother, because he wants to pull up the plants every day and see if there are any goobers on the roots yet. He is too little to understand that it takes a long time to make goobers.

We have a patch of pop-corn down away from the garden and other corn. You see you have to have your field corn and popcorn and sorgham and sugar cane all in different places or it gets mixed when it tassels and none of its any good.

Saturday:

I forgot to write any on my letter yesterday, and before that I was too sore because I fell off of Spot on the way back from the pasture. She is Billy's calf

and he said I could ride her because he did, but Spot didn't like it and butted me off. I knocked the scab off my nose and took off some more skin which is all of it. Uncle Louis thinks he will get me a nose guard like the baseball players wear. He is a great joker just like father. We think Spot didn't like my skirts, because today I rode on Cleopatra, Mandy's calf that I named, and she let me. Billy is going to break Spot in to skirts by tying his mothers apron on her. Mandy and Billy are Lou's sister and brother they play with me a heap. They say Lou is bigety now that she is our nurse and I think she is a little bossy but very nice. I am going with Mandy for the calves so no more today from your loving daughter, Sally. P. S. for Father. Uncle Louis says that he is afraid my letters will be too exciting for Mother, so you had better just read parts to her, and leave out about my nose. But one good thing, all the freckles will be off when the new skin comes. that will be a comfort to Mammy so be sure and tell her, she worries so much about my freckles.

Thursday:

DARLING MOTHER AND FATHER. This is too busy a week to write you before. We are plowing the sweet potato and sugar cane and water melon patches.

The mules pull the plow and Alex holds the handles and I ride straddle on the plow-stook far down in front of the handles and right at the back of the mules and help to hold the plow down—at least Alex thinks maybe I do. I love it for the dirt smells so sweet when the plow share cuts way down deep and turns it up. It feels so good too when I drag my bare feet along in it. I took off my shoes and stockings but Aunty made me put them back on till it gets warmer but I think it's warm enough. Mandy is barefooted. Anyway Aunty didn't see me till we were thru plowing.

Alex's mules are named Bec and Lize and they are educated mules. When you say—"Haw," they turn



one way, I *think* its left and keep on turning every time you say it. But if you say "Gee" they turn the other way. You don't have to touch the lines at all. I call that pretty smart.

This is very particular work for the sweet potatoes and cane need fine dirt to grow in and Alex will have to harrow it too. He stands on the harrow but I cant ride on it too, for it bounces around and we might fall on each other and Alex is pretty big to fall on you.

The sweet potatoes slips are coming up in a little bed where we planted the whole potatoes and they are awful thick so as soon as the ground is ready they will have to be pulled apart and planted out in this patch where they will have room for their vines to run.

Alex says you don't plant sugar-cane seeds but just lay good size pieces of good cane along in little ditches made with a little plow and cover them up good. They sprout at the joints and come up to make new canes. I will watch and see if they really do. I am a little worried about the sugar cane for I am afraid we will not have plenty of it to eat and to make molasses for batter-cakes and for candy pulling. They plant sorgham seeds in another patch for molasses too, for the hands.

Your busy daughter SALLY.

Tuesday—another one, and two other days.

I did a new and nice thing today. I got hungry and asked Dilsey for something to eat but that isn't new. She gave me a ginger cake and a tin cup and told me to run down to the milking shed and tell Aunt Hannah to give me some milk so I went and this is the new part. The cows were all at home and there are a lot of them. They were eating their supper out of a long trough. Beauty and Suke had their heads tied to a rail above the trough because they hook round when they are milked. I don't think the milking shed is very nice, it's too low and hasn't any sides, only just a back and the back is nothing but fence-rails stacked up between pairs of posts stuck in the ground every now and then, to kept the rails from tumbling down. The cows don't have stalls cepting a rail propped up on the trough between each standing place and they are pretty cows too.

Aunty says that cows don't need a warm place to stay down here. Just a shed like this to milk under and for bad storms so I reckon its all right but I wouldn't like it if I were a nice cow, and I don't think it's fair to treat the horses so much better.

Aunt Hannah milked my cup full of milk and it was all sweet and warm and foamy on top—like

soda-water—I sat up on the fence and ate it with my ginger cake and it tasted delicious!

Mother, the little calves are the sweetest things! They have their supper first, then you pull the calf away with a rope and milk the mother cow. Aunt Hannah let me pull one of them. It seemed awful strong for a baby and I pulled hard. It came loose from its mother too quick, so I sat down on the ground and the calf sat down on me and we had a time for a while getting me and the calf straight—but we did. I have a big bruise on my leg where the calf kicked me only it didn't mean to do it for it is a sweet gentle calf really.

Billy was down at the cow sheds. He held the cow's tail to keep her from switching it in the milk and hitting Aunt Hannah in the face, and he waved a branch of pine needles to keep off the flies. I wanted to hold a cow's tail too, but Aunt Hannah was afraid the cow might not like my way of holding it so she wouldn't let me. But when I've been here a little longer she is going to let me and teach me to milk.

Billy says I can practice on Spot's tail for Spot likes me now and does not butt me off when I ride on her. She is a big calf and eats grass not milk like these little ones. I forgot to tell you there was a whole lot of milk and Alex came to help take it up to

the dairy for Lucy to strain into milk pans. He toted one big bucket *brim full* on his head and one in each hand and he never spilled a drop! And Aunt Hannah toted one on her head, too, and so did Billy only not so big a bucket, without holding them, but I couldn't even keep a little bucket on my head, it kept sliding off. I will have to practice a good many things like holding cows tails and toting buckets on my head and pulling away calves from their mothers, but I reckon I will learn if I keep on trying. Uncle Louis says that is the proper spirit and that he really isn't much a head-bucket-toter himself, which is encouraging to your igneront daughter Sally.

DEAREST MOTHER.

This is your letter but father can read it too if he wants to. We are having a gooder and gooder time. Today I helped Lucy churn. She pours the thick clabber and cream in 3 churns, a big stoneware one with a dasher, a littler one but not so very little with a dasher—and a barrel one on a frame which you turn—I mean you turn the barrel. Sol always churns the barrel and Lucy churns the big one herself and who-ever comes along takes the littler one and I was the one who came along today. I am a good churner and don't splash the milk out hardly at all with the

dasher which is a pleasure as I am tired of having to learn how to do everything.

We all talked and part of the time we sang and told the butter to come. Lou taught me mine, this is it—

“Come butter come, come butter come!

Peter’s at the gate with a spoon an’ a plate

Come, butter, come!”

Sol’s song sounds sorter like a big frog’s.

“Butter, butter, *cum-er-long, cum-er-long—cum-er-long,*” is all he sings as he turns the barrel and the milk goes sloshing around. He says he made it up himself. Lucy’s song says:

“Come, butter, come!

De king en’ de queen am a-standin’ at de gate,

Waitin’ fer some butter in a cake,

Come, butter, come!”

I had little bits of butter on my dasher first but it took a lot longer to get many of them and Sol’s butter gathered first. But it didn’t help him much cause he had to finish up Lucy’s churn while she took up his butter. She dipped it with a paddle and patted all the milk out in a yellow bowl, put it in a mould and when it came out it was a pretty cake, all golden with a flower on it. Lucy wrapped it in a wet cloth and put it in a bucket. When all the butter was ready and packed she let the bucket down in the dairy well

with a long rope to keep the butter hard till it goes to town to be sold or we need it.

We churn out doors by the dairy house. It's down under the big trees and has awful thick log walls all chinked close to keep the sun out. It's got dugout log troughs full of cold water and Lucy puts the pans and buckets of sweet milk in this and there are some shelves too for the pans and milk things. The well is in the middle. There is a honeysuckle vine over where we are sitting and it smells so good.

Lucy let me pat my own butter and mold it too and we had it for dinner and Uncle Louis said "who made this butter, it's just delicious." He did really Mother, and he wasn't foolin because he ate a lot and he was sure enough surprised when I said I did. Aunty said I was a good worker so I am glad I churned that butter even if my arms did get tired. I like Lucy she is not so ellergant as Thomas but very nice. She told me some about Manners. You have to know more manners on the plantation than you do in town, so I am glad Mammy taught me a few at home like to say—please and thank you, Yes Ma'am and No Ma'am and not to talk back. Tell her Thomas says I have very nice table manners. He noticed I say "Thank you for the biscuit" and keep my elbows off the table and always leave a little on my plate. I

don't take the last piece of chicken either but leave it for old Mrs. Manners, who I know now is just a name not a real person as I thought when I was a child. Brother still thinks so, because today he asked Lou if Mrs Manners lived in the smoke house because he didn't ever see her in the kitchen.

Your devoted SALLY.

P. S. Uncle Louis thinks this diary better be sent on before it needs a special mule to take it to the post office. He says I am a *prolific* writer. He says a lot of this sounds like the farm paper and that Father will just love it because he always *loved* life on a farm which is a joke of course. Lou is like Father she thinks Town is much nicer than the country but we don't.

Here are hugs and many kisses for Mother and Father and Mammy and Cook,

From SALLY.

CHAPTER VI

SALLY TAKES CHARGE

THE day began unfortunately and went on growing worse! At the lot, Kate, the most nervous and fussy of the fine young colts, gave Richard a hard nip on his arm, and the place soon swelled and ached dreadfully.

A little later Alex came back from the post office with a letter for Uncle Louis, saying that Preacher Lee had been found, but that he could tell nothing more about Richard than they already knew. Thus the last trail to the boy's past ended in silence, and the ache in his heart was worse than the ache in his arm, for he knew now the difference between being an outsider and a real member of the family. In this big loving family group he felt more alone than ever before in his life.

Just before dinner, three carriages drove into the lane, and as usual, when company came in unexpectedly, there was much pleasant bustle. All the children rushed out to catch some extra chickens for Dilsey, who stood in the yard and directed the chase.

"Da' he go," she called. "Run, chile, run! Head 'im off fo' he gits in de 'tater patch!" as the chickens scurried for their lives.

The grown-ups stood by and laughed at the fun, but Richard stayed off by himself. Presently he heard Cousin Will say crisply, with a glance over his way:

"I'll tell you he's no Lyle. Blood will always show up."

At dinner Aunty whispered to Van, who sat next to her.

"Van, darling, take your elbows off the table and use your spoon instead of your knife"; but Van shouted loudly in reply:

"Richard's eating with *his* knife, Aunty, and he's got *his* elbows on the table."

Poor Richard turned crimson. He jerked off his elbows, dropped his knife, and turned over a glass of water on Cousin Jennie's dress, and of course there was some confusion in spite of quick help from Thomas and Betsy.

After dinner all the boys were sent off down to the grove, and here Richard, who knew nothing of other boys, must have his tryout.

How they teased and tormented him! They mocked his mountain drawl and queer talk. They asked

questions and doubled up with loud laughter when he answered. They shouted horrid things and grew worse because he did not try to talk back or fight.

It was in the midst of this boy baiting that Sally appeared. She listened a moment; saw the dumb misery of Richard's face, and then turned like a tiger cat on her cousins.

"Shame on you, you mean, hateful boys! You all are just a lot of cowards and bullies and not Southern gentlemen at all! Richard's a stranger, and course he don't know our ways yet. But, anyway, *I'd* just as soon talk like he does as like a nigger, and that's the way you boys talk. Everybody in town would laugh at you, too. I should say they would!" Her scorn was quite withering.

"An' John, Junior's, table manners are *unspeakable*—Aunty said so—an' Bob can't read a-tall hardly—his teacher said so—an'——"

Here Sally went on down the roll until her rage finally dissolved in angry tears. She went weeping back to the house, where, however, she refused to say what was the matter. Sally was no tattle-tale.

The boys were abashed for the moment; Sally's words hit squarely. Then they gazed sheepishly at each other and Richard.

"Aw, Richard, we were just a-foolin'," began Bob,

when a welcomed shout called them to go home, and for once they hurried gladly to obey.

But Richard went farther into the grove and sat down by the pool. Not for anything would he have faced that crowd again.

It was all true—he was nothing but poor white trash, just as these boys and the Negroes said. He'd never be the gentleman they talked so much about, so he'd give up his dream of learning, and the dream, too, of belonging to these gay, happy, talky people, who loved each other and hated him. How glad they'd all be to get rid of him.

Well, he hated them, too, and he hated this low, flat country with its slow, muddy streams and warm, heavy air.

Then all these black people who stood around and did things for you, and called you "Young Mars' Richard" to your face and muttered, "Po white trash," when they turned away—how he hated them! Yet, how he longed to order them around as the others did. He envied even little Van's lordly ways.

Yes, he would go back to the mountains. That was where he belonged, and he'd leave tonight! . . .

Richard was so deep in his unhappy thoughts that he did not hear Sally as she came back through the

woods until he felt her arms round his neck and her warm cheek pressed against his.

"Richard, darling, they're horrid bad boys. All they need is a good beatin' up. Next time you'll give it to them. But they didn't really mean anything. They teased Brother and me, too, when we first came. You're every bit as good as they are and a whole lot better—so you are!"

Richard was caught with all barriers down, and he couldn't get them up.

"No," he said, "I hain't, an' I'm a-goin' away."

Sally sat up, faced him squarely, steel again in her blue eyes.

"You couldn't," she said. "Richard, you *just couldn't*. Don't you see that would make you a coward too? You're a Lyle, and the Lyles are all truly brave people and soldiers, and when you get used to things you'll love it all, just as we do."

"Nobody wants me," said Richard, "an' I hain't no kin o' your'n."

"I want you," said Sally, "and so do Uncle Louis and Thomas. You *are* my dear cousin, and I love you. Besides, your name is Richard and the Richards never run away. They fight! Why, don't you remember Richard Cœur de Lion, and Dick Whitting-

ton, and Dickon-Bend-the-Bow in Robin Hood's band?"

"No," said Richard dully, "I never heard tell of 'em."

"Why, Richard Cœur de Lion was a great king. He was so brave, people called him the 'Lion-hearted.' That's what 'Cœur de Lion' means. He led great armies in the Crusades. They fought in strange lands to rescue our Saviour's tomb from the cruel heathen Saracens who had captured it and wouldn't let Christians come to worship there. He had a *dreadful* time, and was kept in prison for a long while, and his wicked brother stole his throne. But he was always brave, and after many years he was victorious and came to England and turned out his brother, and was King of England once more."

"But I hain't no king," objected Richard.

"Well, then, there was Dick Whittington. He was a poor hungry boy," went on Sally.

"Sounds more like me," muttered Richard.

"But he wouldn't give up, either," said Sally. "No, sir-ee! He kept trying, and by and by he was thrice Lord Mayor of London! Wait a minute, I'll get the books, and we'll read."

In a moment she was back with her beloved *Child's History of England*. Soon the two children

were in an enchanted world, where courage and brave deeds are commonplace and where the hardships and trials of Richard the First of England made *this* Richard's worries seem nothing at all.

Twilight came, and the letters grew dim. Sally closed the book.

"You won't go away, will you?" she said softly.

"No," he answered. "I'll stay on an'—an' shoot the Saracens till I win."

"Oh!" exclaimed Sally. "Let's make it a game, Richard. It will be just *our* secret. We won't tell a soul. Won't it be fun!" For Sally adored secrets.

A warm little feeling crept into Richard's heart. He had never had a secret with anyone in his whole life, and he, too, felt that it would be fun. Going back to the house they made plans.

"But how'll I know *how* to do?" asked Richard.

"Why, just ask Auntie or Uncle Louis or Thomas," said Sally. "That's what I do."

"I'm 'shamed," said Richard.

"Well," said Sally, "I don't see why. You're nothin' but a boy. Anyway, I'd rather be 'shamed before just *them* than everybody," she added practically.

"I reckon that's so, an' maybe t'won't take so long if I watch keeful and try all the time," he said

hopefully, a new light in his blue eyes and a lift to his head.

"Course it won't," said Sally, "an' I'll remind you when I notice. I'll just clear my throat like this, Ahem-m-m, so nobody will know about it. I *am* your very own little sister, Richard, from now on. Van is your little brother, and you *have* some folks of your own."

So Richard Cœur de Lion, alias Richard Lyle, buckled on his armor stoutly and returned to the attack, ready to do battle to the death.

After supper Richard and Sally talked things over with Uncle Louis, Sally did most of the talking, and Uncle Louis helped out, but Richard managed to tell some of his problems and doubts, and found wonderful comfort and aid from the kind, wise words he heard.

As they talked, suddenly all the queer, shapeless, meaningless parts of Richard's puzzle clicked into place. He was not friendless at all—he had warm friends, who wanted to help him, and a devoted little sister besides. He was a boy with a chance to learn many things, to go to college and become a fine man. He could be a comfort and pride and like a real son to Auntie and Uncle Louis, who had no son of their own.

It was late when Uncle Louis looked at his watch, then held out his hand to Richard as one man to another.

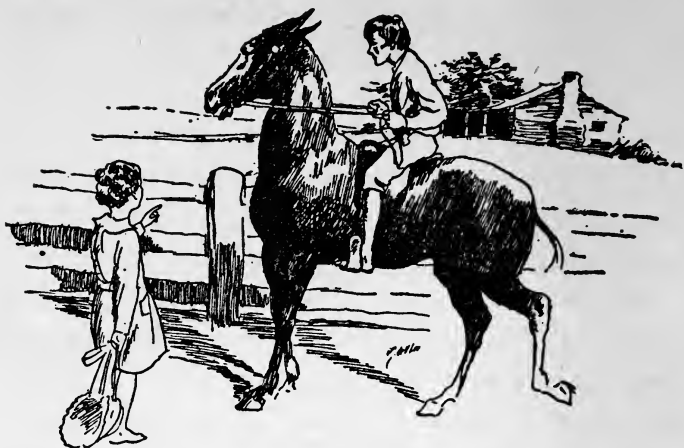
"My, but it's past bedtime for us farmers!" he exclaimed.

"You slew a whole band of Saracens to-night, Richard," whispered Sally in the hall. "It's a glorious victory!"

After this there was no more reserve before Sally. She so blithely attacked the many vital problems which beset Richard's path, and prodded and pushed him with so much enthusiasm, that he quite forgot to be sensitive or shy with her. Indeed, he became a bit excited himself in this pursuit of new words, manners, and ways; of grammar and grace!

Then Sally went down to the lot with him and fussed over and petted the high-strung horses till Richard grew easy with them, too. She made him practice on old Bob, a mule turned out to pasture, till he could stay on in a trot. And though he didn't seem to be part of the horse, as the plantation-bred children did, he soon learned to ride so well that Uncle Louis said he might use Ned for his regular saddle horse. Sally was indeed puffed up with pride at her accomplished charge.

Of course, Richard had many hard pulls, but all



the bitterness was gone, and the boy slowly began to find himself and make his own place at White Hills.

First he won approval from the grown-ups because he was so quiet and reliable. For a time the boys, both black and white, were stand-offish, but one day Sol went rabbit hunting with him, and from then on he was Richard's devoted follower and bragged shamelessly of his young master's prowess.

"Y'all jes' ought ter seen 'im!" he said to Henry and John, Jr. "He let er rabbit kick up he's behin' legs en take hissef' off near 'bout er mile. Den, ker-flam—I'se tellin' y'all de truf—dat ol' rabbit done laid right down in he's tracks plum kilt!"

"Aw, I don't b'lieve it," scoffed Henry. "Yonder he is now—let's see you prove it."

The upshot was that Richard's stunts with a gun were, in their eyes, quite up to Sol's tale, so the younger crowd trailed around behind him on all occasions. Gradually the older lads, too, included him in their sports, and he was, at last, one of the boys!

Nor was this all. Lessons and books had opened up a new world, and it was a very good thing he had some real work to do, or he would have read and studied all the time.

But, books or boys, regardless, there was no one, thought Richard, like Sally. They rode and dreamed and read together and shared everything as a matter of course.

CHAPTER VII

THE KING WAKES UP

SALLY was telling Richard all about the American Revolution and the misdeeds of King George the Third of England and making a thrilling tale of it. She was quite excited herself as she wound up with this ringing declaration:

“So *THAT* was the end of kings over here. We’ve never had another one, from that day to this, nor bowed our necks to a royal yoke!”

Uncle Louis, who was reading his paper, looked up about this time and remarked, with a twinkle in his eyes, rather loudly to Aunty:

“Well, from all I can see and hear, our king is in right healthy condition.”

Sally dropped the history she and Richard were studying and stared at her uncle.

“What in the world, Uncle Louis, *do* you mean?”

“Mean? Why, just what I said, honey. Our royal king is in pretty good health; he’s up and around,” he answered.

“Why, Uncle Louis, don’t you remember about

our war of independence? This is a republic, and we've got a president now."

He shook his head doubtfully.

"Maybe so, but we've a king too, and a mighty powerful king he is. News of him is printed in papers all over the world. People worry when he's sick and hurray when he gets better. Why, during the war, when the Yankees held him prisoner, many people nearly starved in England. *Our* king has a lot more power to-day over there than King George ever had in this country."

"Now," said Sally, "*I know* you're just fooling. You can't catch me this time."

"No, sir-ee," said Uncle Louis, "I'm telling the real truth."

"Well, then, why isn't it in any of the history books?" went on Sally.

"It is, and I'm surprised such a well-read young lady doesn't know about King Cotton." They all laughed, and Sally said:

"Oh, pshaw, I knew there was some catch."

"I should say there isn't. If you spent all your days trotting around waiting on him, you'd know how it is," insisted Uncle Louis. "It's always something, and he sure keeps me sitting on the anxious seat most of the time. And that reminds me, we've got to tend

some of his work right now. Come on, Richard." Sally wanted to go too, so the three went out together, up the gin-house hill. On the way Uncle Louis explained to Richard:

"Mostly, when the land gets worn out, it's cheaper just to let it go wild and clear some more woodlands to plant, for we've got more land than we know what to do with, and guano costs a heap; but I want to try out that new cotton seed I was telling you about here, so I reckon we'll have to fertilize it."

From the top of the hill they could see far and wide, and it was a lovely sight. Over the low hills and swells, through the hollows and bottoms of the big plantation, the sweeping lines of the fresh-plowed furrows seemed to travel endlessly; rising, dipping, curving, turning, as was best for the precious crop. Laughter and talk floated across from the opposite hillside where the hands were bedding up the last field.

"Haste yo'se'f, lazy nigger, I'se er-leavin' yo'," called Jim to Dave as he finished one row and then plowed back the other way, piling up the earth in a ridge between the two furrows.

"Lazy nigger yo'se'f, jes' skimmin' on top o' de groun'. Better lean on dat plow fo' dat nigger-boss Thomas gits yo'!" sang out Dave in reply.

"Giddap, mule! Hey, dere, make way fur dis chariot!" shouted Alex as he bumped along on the harrow, which broke the clods and leveled the ridge into an even four-foot bed.

"Y'all ain't de only watermillions in de patch. I'se er comin' myse'f!" came from Dan, who followed far behind with his lighter plow, opening a shallow furrow for the seed in the middle of the bed.

"Pretty good place, old White Hills, I say," said Uncle Louis proudly, looking down at the children. "How about it?" Sally beamed with enthusiasm.

"Oh, it's scrumptious! I love it, I love it, I love it!" she chanted, and Richard said shyly:

"I like it too."

Just at this moment Bill came over the top of the hill with a load of guano. The two boys filled their shoulder sacks and went trudging along the rows. They poured a thin steady stream of the fine yellow powder through the long tin guano horns into the furrows. Sally's small nose turned up even more than it did naturally, as she said:

"I'd help too, Uncle Louis, but I can't stand this awful smell. I'm going home." Then she spied Mr. Roan at the gin-house door, so she skipped over to see what he was doing.

"Quit that, Ned," he called to a darky who was

hastily scooping up a basket of cotton seed from the old seed pile under the shed. "You got a poor stand of cotton last year because you took moldy sprouted seed, and here you are trying the same trick again."

"Yassir, yassir," agreed Ned, shuffling up the steps to the dry upper room where the planting seeds were stored last fall, after they had been closely ginned and well dried.

"Planting's going fine, sir," said Mr. Roan, as Uncle Louis joined them. "Lots of the share croppers are coming in for their seed. Looks like the frost danger is about over, an' the ground's about right, too, so the sooner we get the seed in the better."

"I'll hustle them up right away," said Uncle Louis, and soon, all over the plantation, the planting was well under way. Up and down the long rows slowly trudged the darkies, each with seed sack over shoulder, dropping the fuzzy gray seeds into waiting furrows; later spreading a light earthy covering with harrow or hoe or even their own broad black feet!

The sun was soft and warm, and fine showers came at just the right moment, so in a few days the plants began coming up, fuzzy gray caps worn rakishly on tiny leaf or crooked back as they crept out into the air and sunshine.

"Cotton's up, cotton's up!" rejoiced everyone at the big house and in the cabins.

"My, but we're getting a fine stand!" said Uncle Louis jubilantly, as the straggling green lines in the field grew longer and thicker each day.

"Why is everybody making such a fuss, Uncle Louis?" asked Sally, "Don't cotton always come up?"

"I should say not like this," said he. "If there's anything fussier than a cotton seed, I don't know what it is. Too wet, too dry, too cold, too anything—there it lies! Sometimes it's two or three weeks coming out of the ground, and sometimes it rots and we have to plant again."

Presently all hands were chopping cotton, thinning out the thick growth till finally one strong thrifty plant stood about every foot along the rows; then trying to keep down the weeds and grass, which grew faster than cotton.

"Gin'ral Green's er taking de fields, en us'll sho hab to hustle en git 'im on de run," said Dan with a grin, as they plowed and hoed day after day in the spring sunshine.

And Sally said:

"You might just as well give me a hoe too, Uncle Louis, 'cause there's nobody to play with. Mandy

and Lou and Billy and everybody's choppin' cotton!"

"The hands have moved over to the new ground field, Richard," said Uncle Louis, one morning, "and I reckon you'd better help over there till we get that cotton cleaned out. Stop on your way back from your lesson with Dr. Barnes."

"I b'lieve I'll go too," said Sally. "I'll take Richard's dinner to him. Can Dilsey fix mine too, Aunt, so I can stay and tote the water for Richard when he's thirsty, and play in the branch?"

Aunt said, "Yes," so after lessons Sally rode away on Daisy with a lunch basket and a book. She planned joyfully all the way. There was a clear branch with pebbly bottom running through the new grounds, and a great piney-wood began again where the cotton stopped. It was noon before she saw the tall ghosts of the former trees which here and there stood desolately about in the green field. The hands had gone for dinner down to the cabin where their cook lived, but Richard was waiting at the edge of the woods. He was talking to a strange white man, who looked up in a startled way as the sun shining on her tin bucket flashed in his face; then disappeared into the woods before she could get to them.

"Who was that?" Sally wanted to know.

"I dunno," answered Richard, "he said he was

huntin' for the river, an' I told him the way. Gee, I'm hungry!"

They climbed the hill and, stretched out on the cool springy needles under the pines, ate their lunch. Afterward Richard carved many tiny boats from the thick pine bark and rigged them out with leaf sails, while Sally read aloud until the noon rest hour was over.

When Richard went back to work, she gathered the boats in her apron and started down toward the branch, which she reached in an unexpected hurry. For her feet went from under her, and down the slippery hillside she whizzed, faster and faster, till, splash, and there she sat, a much surprised Sally, in the dancing water with boats bobbing excitedly all around her.

She scrambled up with a giggle and waded after her fleet, leaving the sun to tend to her clothes. Anyway, now that she was wet she might as well get a little wetter, so she stamped along, making big waves for the voyage.

After awhile the stream spread into a little pool, then dropped into a deep thicket. Here Sally fished out the boats and was just turning back when up through the trees she spied that strange man again. At the same moment, however, Ike called from the

field: "Hey, li'l missey, want er ride?" So Sally promptly forgot the man and ran to take her favorite seat on the plow, riding along close to the sweet-smelling earth, between the rows of young cotton.

"Wait a minute, Ike, what's this?" she asked presently, as she pulled off a small tight green bud growing out of the joints of a cotton plant.

"Dat's er square," said Ike. "Dey makes de blossoms, what makes de bolls, what makes de cotton."

"But they're not square," objected Sally. "They've got three sides and a point at the top—look, Ike."

"Dat's dey name, li'l missey," said Ike, "and dey sho' am makin' fas' time. 'Tain't been six weeks since dat cotton went in de groun', en jes look at hit!"

"Oh, oh, oh, and just look at that, Ike!" squealed Sally, dropping the square in a hurry.

For there, right under foot, hopped a big cottontail. He stopped, sat up on his hind legs, and wriggled his saucy nose at them. Then the next moment Br'er Rabbit was kicking up his heels straight down the row, followed by all the choppers with uplifted hoes.

"He dat same ol' rabbit! Git im! Git im!" called Ike.

• But not at all. The rascal went just fast enough to



keep safely ahead of his pursuers, and after a merry chase, which he seemed to enjoy as much as the darkies, he suddenly left them far behind and was gone.

Sally danced with delight at his escape and laughed at the breathless hands as they slowly returned to their work.

"Dat ol' rapsallion come out in dis field mos' ebery day," said Ike. "En I sho' b'lieves he jes' er-foolin' wid uses. Nemmine, us gwine to git 'im bime-by."

Back at the big house, Sally gave a glowing account of the afternoon.

"Seems to me something different is always going

on out in the field." Then she added: "Oh, yes, and a funny man asked Richard how to get to the river and didn't have sense enough to go right, 'cause I saw him again up in the woods, long time after our dinner."

"Some tramp, I reckon," said Uncle Louis. "I don't want you talking to 'em, honey."

"I didn't—'twas Richard," said Sally, as she hurried out, for Auntie called that the darkies were coming up to do their trading, and she needed help in the storeroom. Sally got the tin plates, snuff, and the buttons which Aunt Viney wanted, also a clay pipe for Uncle Dan. Richard, who joined them, measured the calico and jeans for Aunt Callie's Babe, and put 'Ria Lu's meal in her sack, while Auntie wrote it all down in the account book, to be paid for when the cotton crop was sold next fall.

Then Dicey wanted a cake of sweet soap for her tiny new baby, which she proudly unwrapped to show to them. Such a plump cunning little tan mite as it blinked in the light while Sally cooed delightedly.

Next Candace came up and said:

"Mistis, I wants ter git some white gloveses en er piece o' skeeter nettin'."

"Why, Candace, you're *not* going to get married

again!" exclaimed Aunty, for pretty yellow Candace had already had four husbands.

"Yas'm, I'se done run dat lazy no count 'Kiah off, en me, en Ike's weddin's set fer Sunday. I needs er fresh veil, en Ike tole me to fotch 'im de gloveses. Gimme de bigges' ones, mistis. Ike's got han's jes' like hams." She grinned over her bridal finery and invited all the white folks to come, as they came out.

Then Richard went over to the smoke house to help give out rations, for the wage-hands were already waiting around on the wood pile, singing and patting Juba, in the gathering dusk.

"Uncle Louis, do you and Aunty give them all these things?" Sally asked, as the last hand was off with his weekly supply of meal, meat, peas, and molasses.

"I was just wonderin' how you run things. I can't seem to get it straight, some way," said Richard.

Uncle Louis sat down on the wood pile.

"Well, it's this way. I hire Ike and the others you work with, Richard, for regular wages and their food—wage hands, we call 'em—to raise cotton and do the other work. But there's a heap more land than they can 'tend to, so I have a good many families on the place raising cotton on shares. They haven't a thing of their own, so I furnish the land, cabins,

tools, and mules, and they do the work. Then we divide the cotton when the crop is made. We let them have food and clothes and other things they need here on the plantation instead of sending them to store to run bills, and they pay for this out of their share of the cotton. It's mighty hard to make things come out even, for the price of cotton is so low," and he stared absently into the deepening shadows.

Then the moon came above the horizon, and Dilsey urged them in to supper before the biscuits were cold.

Afterward they stepped out on the moonlit veranda for a moment.

"Look at that big ring around the moon, Uncle Louis," said Sally.

"Heavens," he exclaimed, looking up. "I hope that don't mean more rain right away!"

But it did.



CHAPTER VIII

OL' MAN TROUBLE

OL' MAN TROUBLE came riding into White Hills on a heavy black cloud which quickly spread dark shadows over the sun and over the spirits of everybody and everything on the plantation. The air turned raw and chilly, and rain came down, day after day, in gusty, beating showers.

Soon the cotton began to look sickish and rusty. A growing army of leaf worms appeared, while the

grass and weeds grew like Jack's beanstalk and choked the already discouraged cotton plants.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Sally, as one gray day followed another, and Uncle Louis's face grew long and solemn. "Why, I never dreamed weather was so important! I just thought it kept you from playing outdoors, sometimes."

"Well, I knew the other was too good to last," said her uncle on his way to the lot where the hands were coming in, wet and shivering, from the fields.

"Gin'ral Green's done tuck de fiel's, en he sho' got us on de run," said Dan, without any grin this time. "En 'tain't no fun out in dat wet cotton, nuther," while others muttered agreement. Uncle Louis came back more worried than ever, to talk to Aunty.

"Rose, something's the matter with the hands. They're doing altogether too much grumbling. That yellow Dick came pretty close to being downright impudent to-night. The rascal knows I can't spare him; he's a good worker when he wants to be."

"It's only this awful weather, dear," said Aunty soothingly, but he couldn't agree, and walked anxiously to and fro long after Aunty had gone to bed.

It was quite late when from outside there came a low cautious voice:

"Mars' Louis, come to de winder, en don't say nothin'." He stepped quickly over but could see no one, and the same voice muttered: "I hearn tell dat Ol' Man Trouble done unpack he valise en am up ter all kinder meanness. Fust he look like er white boy, en den ergin he look like er big yallow man, but all de time he got er bad heart. Ez for me, I don't know nothin', en I ain't see'd nothin', en I'm jes' er gwine 'bout my own biz'ness." Here a shadow slipped out of the vine by the window and was lost in the grove.

Uncle Louis hurried up to Auntie with his news.

"I knew it," he said gloomily. "Probably Uncle Tom sent someone to warn me, but that's all we'll ever get out of the darkies. You know how close mouthed they are."

Auntie sighed. Things did look serious; and she knew only too well that however much love there might be between them and their white folks, the Negroes would never tell the secrets of their own race.

On the plantation a sullen ugly spirit grew rapidly. Complaints were constant from wage hands and share croppers alike. Work slowed up, then fell off greatly. Uncle Louis rode all day from one field to another, boosting and talking of the good times when

the crops were laid by. He would start the darkies out to work, but neglected crops told what happened the minute his back was turned. Nor did things improve when the sun came out again, as it finally did.

"I reckon you'll have to quit your books for awhile, Richard. I'm sorry, but we're in a mighty tight place," said Uncle Louis, and Richard assented so eagerly that his heart felt a bit comforted. The boy surely was taking hold well and showing a fine spirit.

But troubles kept coming thick and fast. Ed Black slipped off one night with his big family and Uncle Louis's mules, leaving behind only the bills he owed for food all winter and a weedy crop. No one knew a thing about them, but the next day two more families were missing, and a wage hand sent word he was going to the doctor in town, and couldn't come to work.

Uncle Louis was so absorbed in his own worries that he knew nothing of what was going on outside. Now, however, word came that all the river plantations were having the same trouble.

Panic seized the planters! They could remember too well those early days after the war, when the darkies, in first flush of their freedom, roamed from one plantation to another, refusing to work a crop through. Then, later, the reconstruction, when

carpetbaggers coaxed the hands out of the fields to steal and riot. An anxious group gathered at White Hills to make plans, secretly, for curing this new epidemic.

"Someone's sure stirring up our people and toling 'em off. It looks like a tenant thief, but there's no telling. It may be something worse. Anyway, we've got to find out," said one cousin.

"Strange we can't find a trace of 'em! Tell us again what that darky said to you, Louis," added another, and Uncle Louis repeated his warning. The men were quiet; then a thought seemed to pass round.

"Ever find out anything about that boy who took up here?" asked a neighbor, breaking silence.

"Now, Jim, you're barking up the wrong tree," said Uncle Louis indignantly. "He's all right"; but the other rejoined:

"Maybe so, but there's a boy mentioned in the tale you've just told us, and it looks like the whole scheme is being worked from White Hills as a center. He could help a lot, free to go and come this way."

"It ain't fair to let anything go by; Richard does seem to be a good boy, and he's a smart one, all right, but he sure will have to be watched, Brother," said Uncle John, and the other men nodded approvingly.

When their campaign had been planned and the

men were off to their own homes, Uncle Louis thought long. The new suspicion grew stronger in spite of himself as he remembered Sally's mention of the strange man, the usually quiet boy's eagerness to go to the field, and his solitary habits and reserve.

"I'll keep him at home to-morrow," he decided. "He needn't know why." But for once Uncle Louis overslept, and when Aunty finally woke him Richard had gone out to the field. That night when the hands came home Richard was not with them, nor was yellow Dick. The others said that the two had gone into the woods at noon and did not come back. No trace of them could be found.

"The boy just got tired of working so hard and went back to tramping, that's all there is to it," insisted Uncle Louis.

"Yes," said Aunty, "we must remember that he has wandered about all his life, and of course it was too much to expect him to be satisfied here for long."

But deep in their hearts there was real hurt and a conviction that Richard had been disloyal.

"We told you so," said Uncle John. "Well, it's better to have him out of the way than spying around, I reckon. I only hope, Brother, that we won't find our buildings burned and our stock stolen because of

your stubbornness. That young sneak knows the ins and outs of every place round here!"

Other men spoke bitterly to Uncle Louis, for feeling and worry mounted higher every day. Soon, however, Richard was nearly forgotten, for the trouble makers were suspected, and it was a matter of quick, quiet work now, to prevent a serious outcome.

Sally, however, was faithful and deeply distressed. The children did not know of the worst suspicion, but they did know everyone thought that Richard had run away.

"Richard did *not* slip off on purpose, Aunty. You mustn't say so! He *did* love us, and he *did* want to stay here, and I just know something awful's happened to him," she sobbed, and Aunty could not console her.

"Sho' do look like Ol' Man Trouble ain't nebber gwine off," sighed Dilsey, as the dark clouds gathered overhead again, and the wind beat the tree branches against the kitchen roof. And old Aunt Dilsey, grumbling over her achy joints, as she sat by the kitchen fire, predicted worse times yet.

But instead a blessed relief came quickly! The storm proved the long wished for clearing up shower, and later in the morning two cousins came plodding mule-back through the mud.

"We've caught 'em, an' they are in jail!" was the welcome news they shouted. All the world could hear now.

"As low down a pair of scoundrels as you ever saw—scum from down on Orleans levee where the police want 'em worse than anything!" began Jack.

"There's a big yellow chap, part Portuguese, and a little young-lookin' fellow. We found 'em in old Bill's cabin. He and your yellow Dick were their mainstays."

"They were trying to raise rice and cane down in the delta land and came sneaking 'round up here where nobody knew 'em to get hands," interrupted Ed. "They promised the poor darkies high living, when it was sure death instead, 'twix' yellow fever, malaria, and being half starved and worked till they dropped. They had some rotten old cotton boats hid in the backwater on your place, Louis, easy enough with all this rain and high water. One got off, but 'twas caught in the storm last night and stuck on a sand bar down the river a piece. The darkies are shouting and praying for help, and John's gone now, to get 'em off." Then Jack took up the tale again.

"Those rascals are scared to death. They've told everything, hoping we won't be so rough with 'em. And—oh, yes!—say, Louis, they swear that boy of

yours never had any dealings with 'em, but they picked him up because they were afraid he'd got onto their schemes, being out in the field with the hands so much. He's all right, in a cabin over by the river. We're on our way now to get him."

Richard was sitting in the cabin door when the men came up. Uncle Louis felt he could never forget the look on the boy's face as he faltered: "I couldn't get loose, sir." For around his ankle was a chain-gang bracelet, its long chain securely fastened to a heavy staple in the cabin wall.

For days, it seemed months to Richard, he had been anxiously watching for his friends. The whole affair had been so queer and sudden. He was hoeing by himself, a little away from the unfriendly hands, when yellow Dick went by him into the woods. In a moment came a call.

"Somebody come quick, I'se hurt my foot!"

Richard hurried to help, and in a flash Dick rolled him on the ground, stuffed a shirt in his mouth and with razor in hand marched him over to the cabin.

"Us ain't gwine ter hab' no po' white trash spyin' on uses," he taunted, and refused to say more. Once a day he came with a fresh bucket of water and a pan of meat and corn pone.

With a pile of corn shucks on the cabin floor and a quilt for cover Richard did not suffer, but his distress grew greatly as the time slowly passed and no one came. What did they think of him back at White Hills, where he was needed so much? He had been so proud to feel he was a real help. Then he remembered the prison days of his hero, Richard Cœur de Lion—he too would be brave. Surely they must come soon!

He thought over his life at White Hills, trying, as he often did, to understand more clearly what it all meant. He thought of Sally as he first had seen her at the depot before they both came to White Hills. Some day perhaps he would tell her, and how excited she would be; he could hear her squeal now!

He went back to the stories Sally had told him and the books they had read together. He said his Latin rules and words over and over. He watched the birds and rabbits which were all about the cabin. Wouldn't Sally love them!

Then again, fear that the folks would think he had done something wrong and never let him come back to White Hills overwhelmed him, and he pulled and worked the chain desperately, till he was all worn out.

Now it was over, and Uncle Louis's kind arm was around Richard's trembling shoulders as he said,

"It's all right, boy. We'll soon be home. My, but we've missed you!"

"I can tell you I felt meaner than those scoundrels in jail when I saw that poor lonesome boy sitting there all chained up and remembered what we said!" exclaimed Jack Lyle later. "It was pitiful, and I don't blame Louis for being upset."

Richard's welcome back at the big house was warm enough to heal the hurt of being thought a runaway, especially as he could understand that. And happily he never knew of the other suspicion, for the few who did saw no reason to tell.

Dilsey cooked all kinds of goodies for him; Auntie dosed him with quinine to keep off the malaria; while the others kept saying how glad they were he was home again.

As for Sally, she didn't want Richard out of her sight for a minute, much to his secret satisfaction, and she made him tell her over and over all about what happened. The real story of the trouble and why he had been kept prisoner was a great surprise.

"The hands never let on a thing," he said. "They never liked me, and I just thought they wanted to get rid of me for fear I'd tell how they loafed instead of working. I ain't used to their ways, you know."

The excitement soon died away without hard feel-

ing on either side. The planters were overjoyed to get the hands back in the fields, and no one blamed the darkies, who were caught by the fairy tales of the strangers. Then the fright and mishaps of the real runaways made the others better satisfied with home—for a while, anyway.

At White Hills everyone went to work with more than usual vim and with returning good humor. Finally, one May day, Dan came riding in from the field as fast as he could make his mule trot. He burst into the yard and around the house waving a white blossom, quite forgetting his manners, as he shouted:

“Fust bloom, Mars’ Louis! Fust bloom, Mistis! Fust bloom, all you niggers! I done found it, and heah it am!”

Everyone came hurrying out to meet him.

“Hurrah for you, Dan,” said Auntie. “Dilsey shall make you all the biscuit you can eat for supper,” while all the servants grinned and clapped for him.

“Saddle Jeff Davis quick, Thomas,” called Uncle Louis, also cheerful again. “I want to go to town. I believe I’ve beat them all this time.”

He came back in high spirits with the news that no one else had reported a blossom at the post office. Dan had his supper that night at the big house kitchen. He ate sixteen hot biscuits.

"Dat fool nigger gwine ter kill hisse'f," chuckled Dilsey, but she kept handing out biscuit until Dan rolled up his eyes and said regretfully:

"I got ter quit, Sis Dilsey, I got plenty o' tas'e lef', but dey ain't no mo' room inside me." Then he sang the roustabout song:

"How many biscuit kin you eat?
I'se et sixteen biscuit
En' er ham o' meat!"

The next county paper told all about the White Hills victory and had Dan's name in it. He almost burst with pride when Sally read to him about it and put her finger right on the word that said "Dan."

"I've got to find the first open boll myself, Dan," she said, "and get my name in the paper too, next time."

All over the plantation, as the word went round, there was much jubilation about "Uses smartness."

"White Hills am good ernuf fo' dis ol' nigger," said Aunt Viney, after meeting the next Sunday at Bethel Church on the river.

"Amen," agreed the crowd joyfully. "Amen, Sis Viney!"

"En uses white folks am de real quality," said

Candace meaningly. "None er dem ain't neber git in jail."

"Dat dey ain't," came from the chorus.

"Ol' Man Trouble done packed his *valise*, en moved hisse'f offen dis plantation, praise de Lawd!" shouted Dilsey.

"Praise de Lawd," echoed everyone, "praise de good Lawd!"

CHAPTER IX

THE BARBECUE

SUMMER time followed hot upon the heels of Old Man Trouble.

"Oh, Aunty, look, the June bugs are here!" exclaimed Sally, coming in with three big bronze fellows in her handkerchief. "Please, ma'am, tie on the thread while I hold out the leg. Lou says she bets I can't fly three of 'em at once 'thout getting all tangled up, but I believe I can."

So Aunty helped, and Sally, with the other end of the threads tied to her fingers, was off behind the June bugs, who zoomed heavily along, flying as far out as their thread allowed. Van followed with another, and Mandy came to beg for a piece of thread.

For several days after their arrival June bugs were so much in evidence that Uncle Louis finally threatened to switch the children all round if he found another bug tied to a chair or table leg in the house. But about this time the June apples and early peaches began to ripen, and Sally and the boys promptly

moved out to the orchard. Here they stayed so much that Aunty put the castor-oil bottle alongside of the turpentine on the back porch shelf and added a crock of soda for bee stings. For Dilsey complained that she could not keep her soda in the kitchen.

Out in the fields the cotton did its best after the bad setback, and soon after Dan's first one there were many blossoms out. Such pretty creamy things! They turned pink in a day and quickly dropped off, leaving the tiny green bolls to grow and fatten like magic.

The days grew longer and hotter. By and by Uncle Louis rode all over the plantation and looked at all the fields and patches. Most of them were clean and well kept. The plants shaded the ground, too, so the grass and weeds did not grow very much. One night he called all the hands together and said:

"Well, boys, it's about time to lay the crop by. And it's barbecue time too, I reckon."

There was wild shouting and dancing about, for this meant that everyone could take life pretty easy from now till picking time. Of course, there were many odd jobs—wood to chop and haul, fences to mend, and new ground to clear—but there would be plenty of time for going to meeting and for hunting, fishing, visiting, and other good times too. Those

who were behind in their crops went to work with a vim. The women folks washed and starched and ironed and fixed up clothes for themselves and their families.

The day before the great event, Sally, with Mandy behind her on Daisy, rode over to the big spring pasture where the barbecue was always held. Sally bounced up and down joyfully as they crossed the wide stretch of Bermuda grass sod.

"Oh, Mandy, ain't you glad we came!" she exclaimed. For there were sounds of sawing and nailing down in the grove by the creek, and a long line of smoke and flame came pouring out of the ground where the barbecuing pits were dug.

They stopped for a drink from the icy cold spring and paddled for a moment in the clear branch which rippled down to the muddy water of the creek; then ran closer to see all that was going on.

Thomas was down in the grove by the creek helping to put up rough tables. Sol was cutting hickory poles farther down the creek. Richard was skinning rabbits for Uncle Jim, who attended to the barbecuing. Darkies also kept coming in with chickens, rabbits, or even a small pig, to add to Uncle Louis's gift of beef and pork for to-morrow's feast.

By and by the flames died down in the pits, leav-

ing a deep, glowing bed of coals. There was just time enough before sundown to watch Uncle Jim carefully place the meat on green hickory poles, which were laid across the pits, and then mix his barbecue sauce of sugar, vinegar, butter, and red pepper.

"Yes, chile," he said to Sally's anxious questioning, "I'se gwine ter stay right heah all night en' turn de meat en baste it wid dis sauce, en yo'll find hits jes' cooked to a turn ter-morrow. Now run 'long home fo' mistis gits yo'." So she reluctantly went.

Early the next morning the whole plantation was astir. Long before Dilsey had breakfast ready, the darkies began passing on their way to the pasture, hurrying faster with watering mouths as a savory odor came floating on the warm summer air.

At the big house all the servants were in full glory. Thomas wore a high top hat, and his coat tails almost swept the ground. Dilsey was wonderful in a polka-dot calico, ruffled clear up to the waist, all starched and fluted till she looked like a frilled balloon as she floated across the yard. The others were equally fine.

Sally and Van couldn't wait for Aunty, and as soon as Lou was ready they started on.

Mandy met them at the lane. Her stiff-starched dress of turkey red calico crackled delightfully at every step, much to Sally's envy. Her short wool



was braided with red string in tiny pigtales all over her head, and she turned round slowly that Sally might get the full effect.

"Oh, Mandy, you do look scrumptious," admired Sally. "But hurry up and let's go on. I just *can't* wait till we get to the barbecue."

The big spring pasture was indeed a sight as they came near, for hundreds of darkies were already

there, everyone dressed up within an inch of his life!

Near the barbecue pits vegetables were now bubbling pleasantly in iron pots. Ash cake was baking too, and a wild whoop went up from the crowd as Alex drove in with a big wagon full of watermelons and unloaded its treasures in the spring branch to cool off.

"Jes' look at dem watermillions," murmured Mandy in an awed voice.

The women bustled around, setting the table, spreading out fresh figs and rosy peaches in a long row down the middle, or getting more vegetables ready for the pots.

Little darkies rolled on the ground, or fell into the creek, or hung over the pits and cook pots till they were chased away.

Sally and Van, after a triumphant reception by many admirers, joined in all these pleasures. Indeed, Uncle Jim had just threatened to tell master on Sally, and Lou was fishing Van out of the creek for the fourth time when John, Jr., and Henry came racing across the field calling:

"White folks comin', white folks comin'! Ring the dinner bell!"

A murmur of satisfaction went up, for the food was ready, and nobody wanted to wait a moment longer.

Quite a number of the relations and friends had

come over to the barbecue, but these were quickly settled and served at the tables set especially for them. Then the darkies began to feast, and they kept it up till they could stuff down no more, though there was still food in abundance.

"Nemmine, I bet I done wrop myse'f round nighbout ten poun's o' barbecue, en er gallon o' stew, en er pow'ful big mess o' roas'n ears en two water-millions," boasted Ike, as he and Alex stretched out on the grass in contented fullness. And Alex answered:

"Law, nigger, dat ain't nothin' ter whut I done!"

Everyone rested a little after dinner, and then the sports and games began. Thomas took charge, and while the fiddlers were tuning up, the grown-ups and small children from the big house went home. The boys and Sally, however, stayed to watch the fun.

There were races and singing games for big ones and little ones first; then came the real dancing. How those light-footed young things did fly around, as the fiddlers sawed, the onlookers sang and clapped, and the *dum-ti-dum* of the straw beaters rose clearly above all the other sounds.

"Hop light, ladies, on de flo'.

Don't yo' hear dat fiddle en' de bow?"

went the song.

Or it was:

“Ol’ Dan Tucker was a funny ol’ man,
He beat his wife wid de fryin’ pan,
He picked his teeth wid er wagon wheel,
En died wid de toothache in his heel.”

Such monkeyshines and didoes and fancy cuts, as the fun mounted and the music quickened.

“Us kin dance es fas’ es y’all kin play!” called the flying girls, as they swung from one big strong boy to the other. And the fiddlers took up the dare till both sides had to rest.

By and by a little hush fell, and suddenly a big ring of darkies began to form out in the flat grassy meadow. It was time for the special stunts, and shouts for Alex and Jerry, who were famous buck-and-wing dancers, brought forth that pair. Others followed, till presently, out in the middle, to an accompaniment of both shouts and catcalls, strutted Jim Andy. The White Hills champion wrestler was ready to meet all comers! He called boastfully:

“Any nigger gemmon what wants ter hab his pictur’ took layin’ on de groun’ am now axed to step right ’long up!”

There were a dozen answers to this challenge, for all the noted wrestlers in the county were on hand,

The Garland champion, Zeb Downers, was first on the spot.

"Toe de mark, toe de mark," called the crowd, and the two, stripped to the waist, faced each other with folded arms, right leg forward. Then at a signal they gripped, and the powerful fellows bent and swayed and swung—up and down, round and round! Once they both went down, rolling over in each other's arms. "Dog fall," came the shout, but again they were up.

Finally down went Zeb, this time with Jim Andy on top, and there he stayed till the count was up and Jim Andy declared the winner again.

Another two quickly toed the mark, and so on, till the last two winners faced each other. These were Jim Andy, and Victor, a newcomer on the plantation, who had proved a quick, clever wrestler. No one thought he could beat Jim Andy, but he promised good sport and a hard fight, so everyone was all agog.

It was just at this moment that Thomas spied Sally, her cheeks red as poppies, her eyes blazing with excitement as she shrieked and hopped around wildly with the boys. His jaw dropped! He had forgotten all about her. The crowd stared too; then low delighted snickers rose at this unexpected sideshow.

They watched and listened eagerly, for every darky on the plantation knew Sally.

"Dat high-actin' nigger boss ain't gwine ter mek' nothin' outen dat chile," murmured Candice.

Thomas marched over to Lou and ordered her sternly to take her Miss Sally straight home.

"This is no place for a little white lady," he said, but he reckoned without Sally.

"I won't go," she said flatly to Lou, and Thomas fared no better.

There were more delighted snickers as the discomfited Thomas retired from the contest! Then they all turned back to the wrestling. It was a beautiful tussle and a long one, which finally ended with Jim Andy on the ground, held firm by the steel grip of the smaller chap.

A wild uproar, and the new champion went off riding on the shoulders of the other wrestlers. Uncle Louis, who had come back to see how things were coming on, was caught up for a ride too. And the first thing he knew there was Sally, also in state, standing on Alex's shoulders while the crowding darkies shouted:

"'Ray fer Marster en de li'l' missy!"

Up at the big house the ladies were spreading out

a picnic supper when Uncle Louis came in at dusk with the disheveled Sally.

"Victor's the new champion," she called excitedly, "and he's the finest wrestler in the world, I do believe! Oh, Aunt, I had such fun and a ride round too, just like Uncle Louis and Victor!"

Consternation seized the group, for they too had completely forgotten her.

"Oh, Sally!" they chorused. "How *could* you, darling!—All those rough Negro men . . . that brutal fighting . . . no little lady . . . such a tomboy . . . What *would* your mother say?" . . . and more!

"I just don't believe I want to be a little lady, when I come to think of it," said Sally, when they were all through exclaiming. "They have an awful pokey time. Course, I'll mind Thomas when he tells me, Aunt, if you say so—only I'll sure dodge him next time!"

And while Uncle Louis had a bad attack of coughing she rejoined the boys and helped John, Jr., catch a bug to put in his little sister Julia's curls.

As for the barbecue, it went on most of the night and was followed by many long lazy hours of rest and pleasure for both black folks and white folks at White Hills.

CHAPTER X

MIDSUMMER JOYS

THE weather grew hotter and hotter; the cotton grew taller and wider; and the days at White Hills grew nicer and nicer as summer jogged along.

The yard was full of frying-size chickens. Thomas brought in so many luscious cantaloupes and water-melons, purple grapes, late peaches, butter beans, squash, and early sweet potatoes that Dilsey threw up her hands and didn't know which to use. Out on the wide-spreading scuppernong arbor the big thick-skinned grapes were turning golden and perfuming the air deliciously.

As for Sally, she was having the time of her life!

"I declare, darling," said Aunty, catching her on the fly to tie her apron strings, "your nose is as speckled as a guinea egg! Why won't you keep your sun-bonnet on? I'm afraid your mother will think you're a sad tomboy when she gets here."

But Uncle Louis said adoringly, as Sally danced out:

"Never mind about her freckles, her cheeks are

just about as pink as your monthly roses, and tomboy or no tomboy, she's sweet enough to eat."

The news that Mother could not come to White Hills after all was a sad disappointment, but Sally wrote reams of letters to comfort her and Father, and so comforted herself.

MOTHER DARLING:

I cried and cried yesterday when Aunty read your letter. I just don't see why you can't come on down here and go back if Grandmama gets worse again, but maybe you can't, but we did want you so bad, and I am crying again right now, so thats what these spots are.

I was going to write a novel with Cousin John Louis and Richard in it, but I will write you a heap of letters instead so you and Father won't be so lonesome. And we do hope maybe you can come after while and have some fun too.

We just *have* company all the time when we are not *being* company ourselves and I do love it. Last week we stayed with Aunt Louise and now Cousin Jennie and Bess are out here. Every day nearly somebody comes to see us, but Dilsey says *she* don't care as long as there is plenty in the smokehouse and the fryers hold out. She keeps Mandy and Billy up round

the kitchen and the minute she hears carriage wheels or horses, she starts them to catching chickens and sends little Dilsey to the garden and calls Thomas to get a ham for her.

We had a grand time at Aunt Louise's for they had lots of other company too, called a house-party, specially some of the prettiest young ladies! There were always a lot of young gentlemen around too and they gave me nickels to take notes to their girls or to say nice things about them.

Cousin John Louis took me riding in his new buggy behind Queen Marie and Celeste. They are high step-



pers sure enough! He let me drive a little too. Cousin Mary Lyle says he named Celeste after his sweetheart in Tuscaloosa and she went back on him and now he has another girl and *she* wants to know why he named his horse Celeste, so Cousin John Louis has a time of it.

Cousin Mary Lyle is so pretty and sweet and she has a plenty of beaus herself. They all have a mighty good time going to parties and watermellon cuttings and riding and driving. Uncle Louis says my time is coming too, but I reckon I'd rather be a little girl and play.

DEAREST FATHER:

This is tonight and if I can stop scratching the red bugs long enough I'll write you a little. Aunty wanted blackberries for wine and jam so today we went blackberry picking—way out on the back side of the plantation. Dilsey fixed us a nice lunch and we brought the ponies along and took turns in riding and it was more fun! There were just millions of the biggest blackberries with the sharpest thorns too, you ever saw, out in some old turned out fields. We picked our buckets full—gallons and gallons of them and had time to play some too. The branch was low but not dried up, and there was one goodsize mud

hole. Billy caught an eel and we made a fire and played we were Indians going West, Lou fried the eel which looks like a snake but tastes like fish and we ate all that and all the dinner Dilsey fixed and a lot of blackberries too.

Alex came over to meet us at the bars with the wagon or we never could have toted those berries home. A bee stung John Jr. over one eye and its all swelled up so he can't see out of it, and Lou got one of those awful tasting bugs in her mouth with a berry and we all got scratched but we didn't mind, but the red bugs are about to eat me up. I put salt and butter on the bites but they got too good a start. I am so sleepy I am going to bed.

From SALLY.

DEAR MOTHER AND FATHER:

We are up in the sweetest place. Thomas fixed it just for me. Its a little platform way up in the biggest apple tree—and Aunty says *pos-tively* no one can use it unless I say so. Bess and I come up here to tell secrets or read or sew for our dolls. If the boys try to climb up we poke them with sticks or throw apples down on their heads so they can't. Of course I let Richard come for he is my big brother. He is the nicest one of all. Aunty trusts him, she says he has good judgment, but I haven't.

A plantation is a fine place to learn judgment because you have to decide about a lot of things such as whether you will eat all the green apples you want or not so many. I am trying to learn some sense and Auntie thinks I am improving some, but Richard is just natchurally sensible. Even Cousin Sue says now he's a fine boy no matter if he *isn't* Uncle Richard's son, which I know he *is* just the same.

Another Day

Cousin Sue came over today and brought her two little nieces to see us. It rained this morning so Auntie let us dress up and play lady. I put on a little girl dress of hers with funny pantalets. Nell was the Mother and the others were company. They wore hoop-skirts and looked very elegant, till Bess fell backward over her hoop-skirt and she just couldn't get up. She kicked her feet up in the air so funny that we all laughed and laughed, even after we pulled her up, till we were plum silly, so we took off our dress-up clothes and went out to the hay mow.

Richard and the other boys came up and we pelted them with hay and rolled round till John Jr. rolled too far, and fell straight down thru the trap door to the barn floor. We were most scared to death but he was just awful bruised and that's all. He is in bed

now very mad at Aunty. She says he is a most unfortunate child and its a wonder he doesn't get killed, but Lou says he's too mean to kill.

Your devoted

SALLY.

DEAREST MOTHER:

The boys are back and we were kinder glad to see them for Bess and me are both used to boys. Last night we had a lot of fun with slingshots shooting at bats. There are about a million of them flying around in the air late every evening and sometimes they fly in the house. When it was too dark to see the bats the lightning-bugs came out. O, Mother, I just wish you could see how beautiful it is! The hollow below the house was brim full of them and the yard and everywhere outdoors kept twinkling and sparkling, there were so many. We caught some and they made your hands smell funny. We put them in bottles and watched them lighten in there and then we poured them out again to fly with their brothers and sisters.

Then we played "June-Jally," you turn round and round, till your skirts fly out like a baloon and you sing; june-jally, june-jally—till you fall down drunk. The first one to fall is the rotten egg and your head keeps turning for a long time, but we all like to do it, the boys too.

SALLY.

DEAR MOTHER:

Today we've been helping Dilsey who is awful busy with pickles and preserves this week. Dilsey is cooking them in the big kettles out on the rock furnace and we have a table under the trees. Sol and Lou and Richard peeled fruit, Billy kept the fire up in the furnace, Bess ran errands and Mandy switched the flies off the fruit and I stuck cloves in the peaches, and Auntie measured everything, and we talked and sung or told tales. Dilsey is making quince and peach preserves, brandy peaches, peach pickles and water-mellon rind pickles and I can't think what else. I've tasted so many I have a little tiny stomach ache, but not a bad one.

We've already dried some apples and figs on boards propped up on high trestles in the sun and there are a lot more to do. Auntie said to tell you we will send you some of everything later.

Goodnight,
SALLY.

DARLING MOTHER AND FATHER;

This has been a pretty good day. We all went to Sunday School and Church. I had all my catachism and verses but Brother forgot the golden text after I taught it to him three times. Next week I am going

to teach it to him five times, for it is a mortification to have your own brother not know the golden text. Aunty plays the organ and when Sunday school is over we children all go out and play around in the grave yard till she begins it for church. All the ladies stand in the vestibule or on the steps and the men stand in the graveyard but we all talk about what we are going to get and do if this is a good cotton year. But nobody is going to do anything or get anything if its bad. It's alright if it's bad tho for everybody's used to that. But I started to tell you about church. I had on my dimity with pink rosebuds on it and Aunty looked just butiful in a white dress all over ruffles while she played the organ and sang, just like an angel.

Cousin Mary Lyle and her company all looked mighty sweet too. They sat in Aunt Louise's pew, but all their beaus came in late, just when Dr. Barnes said let us pray, and sat in the back of the church where they could watch the girls. The girls pretended not to see them but they did, just the same. All the family was at church so we had a good congregation.

Well, just as Dr. Barnes was preaching mighty hard, we heard the most awful yells outside and every body who was all nice and dozey, except Dr. Barnes, jumped. And I saw Aunt Julia turn red and look at

Henry and John Jr. quick and count them. Uncle John, who was most asleep, waked up and got out of the door before he knew it and two other fathers started too but sat down when they saw Uncle John. But he went too quick for his boys were right in their own pew. It turned out to be Sam Lyle and Don. They hid behind Grandfather Lyle's tombstone to keep from coming in to church. Then Mr. Brown's dog came along and so did a cotton-tail rabbit and the dog not knowing it was Sunday, chased the rabbit. And the boys got excited and forgot it for you know the hind leg of a graveyard rabbit gives you the best kind of luck, so they yelled "sic 'em" and I don't much blame them.

Well, after church Cousin Sam and Cousin Ed just gave those boys a good switching right there in the grave yard before everybody. And John Jr. and Henry looked awful pious and Aunt Julia said "Thank goodness for once," and then everybody began to talk about cotton some more till we came home and afterward too. Aunt Julia's crowd came with us and after dinner we children came down to the grove and slid down the hill-side on the pine needles. They are as slick as glass. Then we laid down on our backs and looked up at the sky and listened to the pines sing. Don't they make the sweetest

music! They seem to most touch the sky and we hoped that a little cloud would get caught and fall down on us, but it didn't. We listened to hear what the pines were singing about. I could hear the words just as plain and I told the others because they couldn't quite. Henry went to sleep and John Jr. put a bug down his neck, one of those horrid scratchy ones. Henry woke up and had to take his shirt off, for Richard to get the bug out and the boys had a fight, so we couldn't have any more pine songs.

Richard and I like to come out here and read by ourselves. The others always do something to make a fuss.

Your devoted child,

SALLY.

CHAPTER XI

LITTLE GIRL LOST

THE morning of this never-to-be-forgotten day started out very peacefully and quite as usual. Sally played around with Lou and Van for awhile after her tasks were done and then went down the lane to Aunt Callie's to find Mandy. A little later Aunty called to Lou.

"I'm going over to Sister's, and think I'll take the children. Where is Sally?" for Van came running in, with Lou close behind, but no Sally appeared.

"I spec' she's down at Maw's wid de chilluns, ma'am," answered Lou.

"Never mind, then," said Aunty. "I can't wait. Just get Van ready; then you can go home for the day, Lou. Dilsey can look after Sally when she comes in," and presently she and Van were gone.

"Yo' sho' got lef' behin'," chuckled Lou when she came down to the cabin. "Das what yo' gits fur so-shatin' wid dese heah common cotton-patch niggers."

"Well, I don't care if they've gone over to Aunt Jule's," answered Sally. "I'm awful mad at John, Jr.,

'cause he put cockleburs in Daisy's tail the last time he was here. The mean old thing! Come on, Mandy."

Mandy stuck out her tongue at Lou and called, "Bigetty nigger, Bigetty nigger," and they went back to their play.

The time was passing pleasantly when Sally gave her hand an awful whack and a much-in-the-way wart got the worst of it.

"Ooo-w-ee, my wart!" she squealed. "Look, Mandy, how it's bleeding."

Mandy gazed with sympathy.

"Yo' sho' must 'a' played wid er pow'ful big toad ter git dat wart. How come yo' don't git Aunt Viney fer ter conjure hit off? She kin make 'em go 'way in no time."

"I just believe I will, right now," said Sally. "I'll be back in a little while, Mandy"; and with that she was over the fence and on her way.

It was quite a good piece across the fields, and the sun was hot, so she was glad to reach the shade of the big water oak which stood by the cabin.

Aunt Viney's cabin was made of rough logs chinked first with smaller sticks and then with clay and straw mixed together. Instead of a brick chimney, it had one made of sticks of wood built up pig-pen fashion and covered inside and out with thickly daubed clay.

A pleasant smell of cooking food which made Sally sniff hungrily, floated out the open door. Everything looked comfortable and homey.

Aunt Viney sat in a home-made rocking chair under the tree, smoking her pipe. Liza lounged on the doorstep. Sam, Liza's husband, was stretched out on the clean-swept ground, fast asleep. Several black pickaninnies without a stitch of clothes on—they didn't wear any in warm weather—were rolling round on the ground with some puppies. The family mule dozed near by, shaking his long ears and switching his tail to keep off flies. Some chickens and the pig shared contentedly a nice dusty spot under the shed, just in front of the collard patch.

Sally had a warm welcome, and while Liza went for a chair, Sam drew some fresh water. Soon the cool dripping bucket came to the top of the well, and Sally had the big gourd full of cold, sparkling water.

"Aunt Viney," she said after a little rest, "I've got a mean old wart, and I came over to get you to charm it off. Aunt Callie's Mandy said you could."

"To be sho' I kin, Sugar-pie," chuckled Aunt Viney. "I'se got er mighty good charm fer warts. Kin yo' gimme a piece off yer coat?"

Sally investigated; a ruffle on her petticoat had a tear beyond mending. She tore this off and gave it to

Aunt Viney, who carefully counted her warts and then rubbed them with the bit of cloth, muttering all the time under her breath. When she had finished she rose with great dignity and said scornfully:

"White chile, I've done wid yo', en I wants ter git yo' outer my sight!" With this she went into the house for a moment, then came out smiling again. The charm was completed.

By this time dinner, which was cooking in the fireplace, was done.

"Won't li'l' missy hab' er bite t'eat?" coaxed Liza.

"Thank you, I *am* most starving," Sally said. "So I reckon I will."

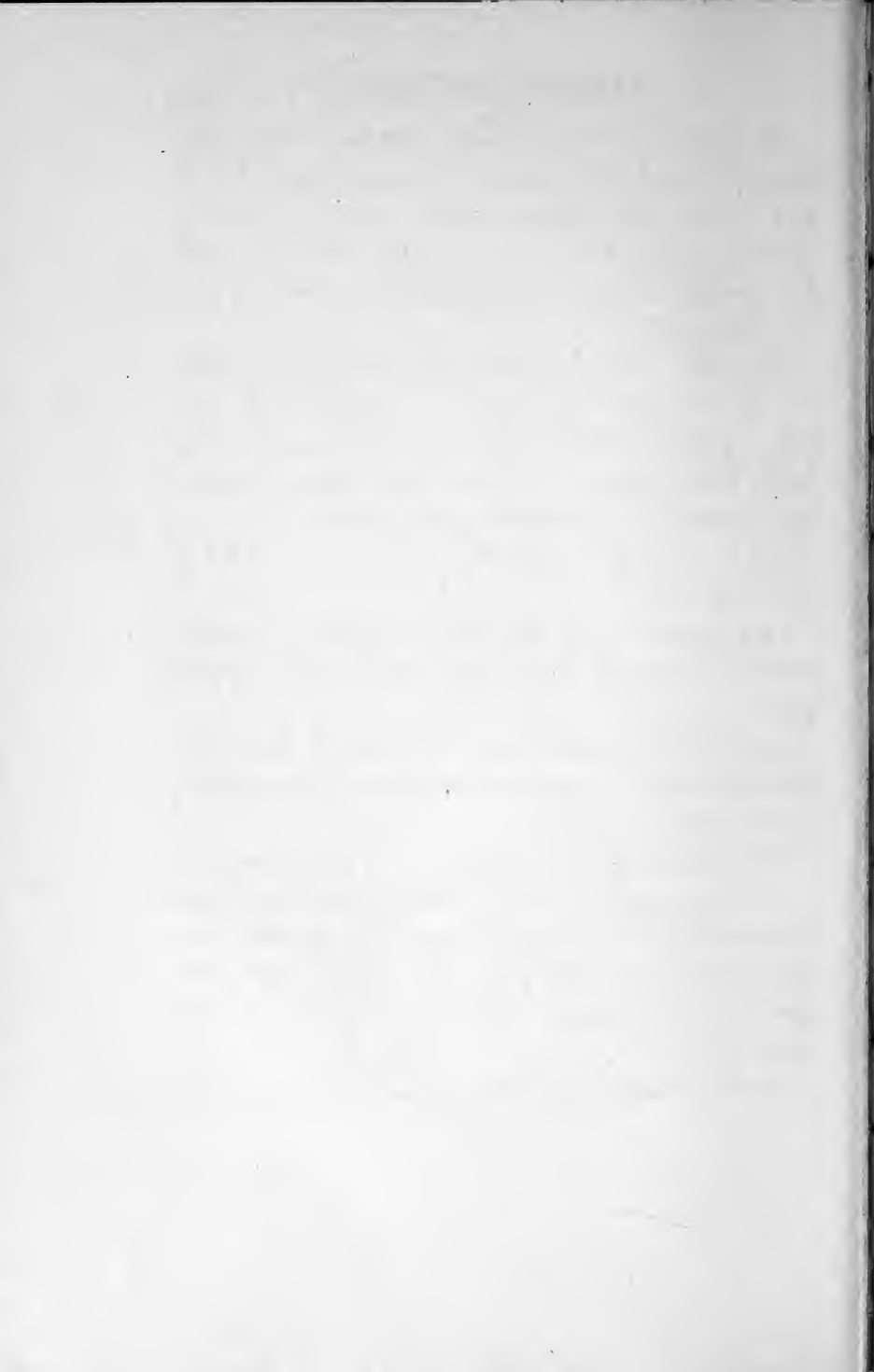
Liza broke off a crusty piece of corn pone; then filled a shining tin plate with cow peas, rich brown pot-liquor, and a piece of fat meat on top. Sally cleaned it neatly and asked for more, while all the darkies gazed admiringly. It was a great honor to have her eat at their cabin.

When she had finished Liza brought the big iron pot of peas and the skillet of bread out in the yard, and the family ate their dinner.

While they were eating Sally peeped inside the cabin, which had but one room and a shed. It was rather dark, for the wooden shutters of the only window were closed to keep out the heat.



*Aunt Viney rubbed them with a bit of cloth, muttering under
her breath*



There wasn't much inside. Just two home-made bedsteads with corn-shuck mattresses, covered with gay patchwork quilts; another mattress, pallet fashion, on the floor; a home-made chest for their few clothes; and some split-bottom hickory chairs. That was all.

The deep fireplace had a rough brick hearth and fire back, a hook to hang cook pots over the fire, and a chimney shelf to hold the tin plates and one oil lamp. But everything was neat and clean, and Aunt Viney and her family were quite content.

"Better take er li'l' nap, honey, fo' yo' goes back," said Aunt Viney.

Liza spread a clean red and white quilt on a shady patch of grass for Sally, and soon all were sound asleep.

It was about three o'clock by the sun when she started home. She stopped at Aunt Callie's house, but everyone was gone.

Sally felt suddenly lonesome. Then said to herself:

"I reckon maybe Mandy's down in the canebrake pasture with Cleopatra. I'll go see." So she went out through the fields for about half a mile, along the winding path made by the stock and their attendants.

All the calves were eating peacefully. Each one

was tied by a long rope to a stake pushed firmly into the ground to keep it from straying off into the canebrake just beyond. Maria's Sukey mooed softly, and Uncle Bob's old nanny goat said "*Ba-a-a*," in welcome, as Sally came slowly into the pasture. But neither Mandy nor Cleopatra were anywhere in sight. Then Sally's eye fell upon a vacant stake with a broken piece of rope hanging from it.

"I do believe it's Cleo's!" she exclaimed. "*It must* be, because all the other calves are here."

She was much distressed, for Cleopatra was Mandy's calf and a very special pet indeed. She had been a weak, pitiful baby, and no one thought she could be raised. Aunty said Mandy could try it. How she did work! She kept the tiny calf wrapped in a warm quilt and poured hot milk down its throat, and she succeeded. For now Cleopatra—Sally named her—was a beautiful young heifer, the pride of Mandy's heart.

Sally ran down to the edge of the canebrake, and peered anxiously in.

"Oh, I just must try to get her," she said. "Soo cow—soo cow!" she called and called. But there was no answer except the gentle rustle of the canes in the wind.

This was the last big canebrake left on the plan-

tation; all the other creek bottoms had been cleared and planted in corn. There were many stories about it. Some of these belonged back in the days of the Indians, for here they hid when in danger, or before an attack on another tribe. Some were about runaway slaves and dangerous animals. The small darkies and many of the big ones were afraid to go near it after dark. Even in daylight it was a weird-looking place. When the children came down to get fishing poles or stick horses or the small canes for yard brooms, they never went in beyond the edge where the canes were scanty. For, leaving out those scary tales, the brake was a boggy, snaky place; easy to get lost in. It might be all right for the mink, weasel, opossum, coon, or other small "varmint," as the darkies called them, also for runaway hogs with their wild children; but not for children or calves!

Sally looked at the narrow trails leading in several directions through the canes.

"I'll just go in a little way on one and then come back and go another," she promised herself. "Then I can't get lost."

The tall canes rustled and warned.

"No, little girl. No, little girl."

But Sally did not stop, though she did go slowly and cautiously. She kept calling, "Soo, Cleo," and

looking back to see that the pasture line was still in sight. Then suddenly she lost it. A rustle and a bulky shape slipped past and plunged deeper in the brake. She felt uneasy. A small fur-clad creature ran almost between her feet.

"I reckon I'd better go back," she decided, and started in the way she was sure she had come. No pasture appeared, however, and the canes seemed to be getting bigger and taller all the time.

Another turn—still no open ground!

She began to run, now this way, now that—trying to find her way out. But there were only the endless stretches of tall canes, now so thick in places she could not squeeze through them. The ground grew damp, even boggy, under her bare feet. Sally was lost in the canebrake!

Her heart beat faster and faster as she ran to and fro. She felt almost smothered in the close hot air. A black shadow of a bird flew over. Sally covered her eyes quickly, but he passed on.

Suddenly it grew dark. She looked up as a flash of lightning tore a great heavy cloud in two and a boom of thunder followed. Down came the rain, and the little lost girl was soaked in a moment. It was a terrible downpour and she could only crouch down between the swaying canes and wait. It seemed 2

year, and yet it was only about an hour when the sun came out again. Soon, however, it began to sink. The light changed to a delicate green as it slanted through the green fringe of slender pointed leaves growing out at each joint of the canes and on their crowns. Puddles of water were all around, and the ground was wet and sodden. Sally could hear the creek plainly. She must be close to it now, and it was evidently up.

Once more she tried to find her way out, shouting at the top of her voice. After a bit the ground felt firmer under foot, but she was too tired to walk another step. She sat down. There was nothing to do but wait till someone came and found her. But suppose no one came! She thought of the tales the little darkies told about the canebrake.

"Dey's ha'nts in dere, en atter dark dey ketches holt o' folks en stomps 'em down in de mud. Dey's Injun ha'nts what uster lib' heah," said Mandy.

"En deys bobcats, en varmints, en b'ars, en big buzzards what picks yer eyes out, en wil' hogs down in dat brake," added Lou. "En de water cropes up en drowns yer when yer ain't er-lookin'."

"Dey tells me mean niggers, so mean de ha'nts en de varmints en de water won't tech 'em, goes in dere to wo'k dey conjures," declared Billy.

Suppose it was true! Suppose the water *did* creep up and cover her before anyone could come. Suppose those rustlings were the ha'nts just waiting till dark to pounce on her. Sally fancied she could see those dreadful Indian shadows with their ghastly tomahawks, and then she cried aloud in fright.

Her own cry brought her back to her senses again.

"I'm a silly girl," she said to herself. "Course there ain't any ha'nts. And maybe if I'll say my prayers hard God won't let the water come up and will keep the bobcats off till Uncle Louis gets here. I'm not afraid, I'm *not* afraid, I'm *not* afraid!" Then she said a little prayer over and over.

"Dear God, please hurry up and let them come, and please protect me from all harm."

She felt better and looked around. As it grew darker, the fox fire began dancing about in the deeper swamp canes. A faint glimmer of light which grew brighter made her jump up hastily and call, "Here I am!" but it was only the moon. Such a welcome moon, though, for now the canebrake wasn't so fearful.

Sally sat down again. But something else was coming toward her. A big terrifying body, closer and closer it drew, till it was upon her! Sally gave a wild shriek—then flung herself at the monster.

"Oh, Cleopatra!" she called happily.

Cleopatra mooded softly. She, too, was frightened and lost and glad for company, for a canebrake is no place for a petted, pampered calf. Sally caught the broken rope and clung to it; then the two settled down together, waiting for rescue.

In the meantime things were stirring at the big house. Aunty and Van came in just as the storm was breaking, and since Lou was not back Aunty thought nothing of Sally's absence. But when the rain was over and Lou came in she asked:

"Where is Sally?"

"I dunno, ma'am. I ain't seed her. Mandy said she went over to Aunt Viney's fo' dinner to git her wart tuck off, en' us went to a meetin' en jes' come back," answered Lou.

"Oh, well, she'll be in soon," said Aunty, still unconcerned. "The rain caught her somewhere." Thus precious moments were lost.

Uncle Louis came in a little later and asked:

"Where's my girl?" Still no Sally! Uneasiness grew. Uncle Louis sent Sol on horseback over to Aunt Viney's. He came back at a gallop.

"Mars' Louis, dey says Miss Sally et 'er vittles dere en tuck a nap en den tuck out fer home 'bout de middle o' de evenin'."

It was past sundown now.

Uncle Louis hurried down to the lot. No one had seen or heard of Sally. The hands were sent out on mules to the other cabins. The hounds were brought up to the house, but what could they do? Even their wonderful noses were helpless against the great rain which had destroyed all traces of her footsteps.

Sol and Richard searched every nook and corner near by; the houses in the quarters, the corn cribs, the smoke house and barns, down in the grove, up in the gin house. All was to no avail.

It grew dark. One by one the darkies came in till all were back, even from the farthestmost cabin on the plantation, without a word of cheer.

Soon the hands were out again, this time to the thick woodlands, with flaming torches of light-wood held high, shouting as they searched high and low. But nobody thought of the canebrake!

The moon came up to look down upon a troubled scene. All the house servants and near-by Negroes were in the yard waiting for news. Some of them faintly wailing and praying.

“O Lawd, bring dat chile home safe.”

Poor little Van cried himself to sleep calling for his sister, while Lou, asleep too, knelt by his bed holding tight to his small hand, as though she would at least save this one of her nurslings.

Auntie sat on the veranda, a knife twisting in her heart, now with a prayer for Sally's safety, now with a bitter thought of self-reproach for leaving her as she had.

Uncle Louis walked to and fro all the time on the veranda, thinking of new places to search, waiting for news, giving orders. Still nobody thought of the canebrake.

Once Auntie asked with trembling lips:

"Oh, Louis, the watering pools? And the creek—it's 'way up, they say! You don't suppose——" She could go no farther.

"No!" shouted Uncle Louis. "No!" and he went on tramping to and fro.

As for Richard, it seemed to him he could not bear the pain that was tearing through him.

For the tenth time he went back down the lane, this time past the quarters, and without realizing how far he had come he suddenly found himself at the canebrake pasture.

For a moment the beauty of the soft moonlit field sparkling with fire-flies, and the delicate lines of tall slender canes quieted him. Then a sudden terror caught him—the canebrake! Could she be back in there? Somehow he seemed to be sure of it.

Down to the edge he hurried, and there was a little

light spot on the grass. Sally's sunbonnet. He *was* right. Richard did not hesitate a moment.

Into the brake he plunged, calling, "Sally, Sally, Sally!"

On he went, in and out, to and fro, following trails or narrow openings; trusting to his mountain skill to find his way. Listening, calling, listening, calling—over and over again—he hurried on.

After awhile he seemed to catch a faint cry. Perhaps only a night bird or some small animal disturbed by his shouts, but he worked his way toward it. Silence, then again that cry. Another shout, and now the cry seemed surely a direct answer. No bird this! He pushed farther in its direction. He heard it once more, still nearer; then presently it came clearly, the voice of the little girl he loved more than anything in the world. No cane barrier was dense enough to keep Richard back now. He could use even a 'possum's trail!

"I'm coming, Sally. It's Richard. Keep calling!"

"Oh, Richard, Richard!" came Sally's joyous chant.

At last he was there, and Sally was sobbing in his arms, while Cleo poked her moist nose down his neck in welcome.

But there was no time to lose. They were too close

to the creek, and Richard knew of its bad overflowing habits in this bottom.

"Let's hurry," he said. Sally took one step and gave a little wail.

"Oh Richard, I just can't walk, my feet hurt so!"

Richard picked her up, but, alas, Sally was a very solid child, and their way was too long and difficult for such a burden. What could they do?

Then Cleopatra suddenly said "Moo-moo-moo!" Sally fairly squealed with joy.

"Oh, you sweet darling Cleo! She says she'll tote me, Richard. Put me on her back. You know Mandy and I ride her sometimes."

Cleopatra rose nobly to the occasion and made no objection when she felt Sally's weight on her back. Perhaps she felt some responsibility for all this trouble, for she followed like a lamb as Richard led her through the narrow winding trails. Turning, twisting, but keeping always in the same general direction, on they went, till at last they saw the pasture spread out before them and knew that home was not far away.

"Sally's found, Sally's found!" Richard's voice rang out in triumph as soon as they were in the lane. The darkies rushed to meet them, followed by Auntie and Uncle Louis.



Here Cleopatra balked! No self-respecting, high-bred young lady cow should be caught in so undignified a position. She lowered her head and forelegs so suddenly that Sally was pitched forward on Richard's own back and there she clung, laughing and crying at once, when the gate swung open and Uncle Louis caught her in his arms.

"She was back in the canebrake," called Richard, for Sally was beyond speech.

A groan went up from the assembled darkies.

"Oh, my Lawd, why Lawd A'mighty!"

"She went in to get Mandy's calf, who broke loose."

A shriek from Mandy. In the excitement she had forgotten to go for Cleopatra and so hadn't even missed her.

"And she got her, and I brought 'em both home!"

"Praise de Lawd . . ." began the chorus.

Here Richard's legs and voice gave way, and he sat down abruptly on the ground, so there was confusion once more. At last the darkies relieved their feelings with joyous hallelujahs and went home.

Aunty recovered her calm and soothed her agitated children; Uncle Louis was the worst one of all, now. When they were in bed and the house was peaceful once more, Aunty went into Richard's room. She kissed him tenderly and whispered:

"Good-night, my brave, precious son." And Richard knew that at last he had found his folks!

When the sun rose a few hours later, the canes were rustling above a wide expanse of water; the creek was out of its banks!

As soon as the news got round to the kinsfolk

everyone hurried over to White Hills with congratulations and special dainties. Richard and Sally were kissed and "Oh'd" and "Ah'd" over excitedly indeed, and the whole experience was discussed till Auntie thought she would go crazy. She so wanted to forget that dreadful night.

Richard literally took to the woods when he heard carriage wheels. Being a hero didn't suit him at all. He felt like saying, "Sho fly," or, "Scat," when all the boys swarmed round him and asked questions. It was almost worse than when they teased him.

But Sally was having a wonderful time, in spite of insect bites and such bruised swollen feet that she could not walk for a few days. She sat in state, while worshiping little darkies and admiring young cousins quarreled for the privilege of waiting on her and hung eagerly on every word. Her tales grew more and more thrilling as she told and retold her adventures.

"An' a bear growled an' looked at you with big glaring eyes from down in the brake," echoed John, Jr., deeply impressed and beaten for once. "Weren't you just scared to death, Sally?"

"No," said Sally, "course not. I shouted at him, and he ran away."

"Did dat big Injun ha'nt come right up close?" asked Sol in an awed voice.

"Yes, he did!" answered the young adventuress.

Alas for Sally, however, just at this moment Cousin Mary Lyle overheard.

"Why, Sally, aren't you ashamed of yourself!" she exclaimed reproachfully. "You know you are telling a great big whopper! There hasn't been a bear in that canebrake for years, and it's silly for a big girl like you to pretend to believe in ha'nts. I've a good mine to tell Aunty on you!"

The crowd looked sheepish for a second; then such a shout went up! Sally, quite overcome at the sudden collapse of her bubble, melted into shamed tears. But presently she recovered and sniffed scornfully at the boys, who teased her unmercifully.

"Silly-Sally, Silly-Sally," they called, or pretended to see fearful things in the air, or shouted, "*Go way, Bear,*" and then ran off in pretended fright.

"Silly yourself!" she answered. "You believed it all, and I was just a-fooling you, ya-ya-ya!"

"No, we didn't, and you didn't," they declared indignantly, and the squabble went on for days. Finally Cousin John Louis, urged to take sides, said:

"Well, it seems to me like a case of the pot calling the kettle black. You'd all better find something else to fuss about."

But it was many a day before Sally really heard the

last of it. And when any of the grown-ups wanted to settle her down they had only to mention casually something about bears or Indian ha'n'ts.

No one, except the boy himself, was surprised when Auntie and Uncle Louis said they had decided to adopt Richard.

"You see, dear," Auntie explained, "we love you and feel you do belong to us somehow, but we can't find any way of proving it, so we are going to make you our son through law. This will give us a claim on each other and will provide a home and an education for you if anything happens to us."

"Is there any chance it'll ever come out about me, so we'll be sure?" asked Richard shyly.

"I'm afraid not very much, dear. Scipio, Brother Richard's body servant, seems the only hope, and we think he must be dead, since all the other runaways have drifted back. We can only pray that we may know, if it is best," said Auntie tenderly. "After all, though, it doesn't matter. You *have* a father and mother now, and the past can take care of itself, can't it, my son?"

Richard answered a bit stumbingly: "Yes, ma-am—Mother," and smiled contentedly into Auntie's eyes.

CHAPTER XII

THREE—TO GET READY!

MAWNIN', mistis, heah I is," said old Zeke, the plantation basket maker, "en I wants de gin-house key."

It was a very hot morning, and Aunty sat on the veranda fanning herself with a large palm leaf fan. She looked up in surprise.

"Why, Uncle Zeke," she said, "is it really time to begin on the baskets?"

"Hit sho am, ma'am."

And it was! For the fence corners and roadsides were bright with goldenrod; the dog fennel made yellow pools and drifts in the unused fields; and the cotton-picking days were not far away.

Sally, who was playing by herself at the gin house, followed Uncle Zeke into the room where the baskets were stored. There were piles and stacks of them, large and small, and he grunted as he looked them over, for many were in bad shape.

"What are you going to do now, Uncle Zeke?"

asked Sally, as he started out down the path with his ax on his shoulder.

"I'se gwine to de woods, honey, to git me some white oak en hickory fer basket splits," and she went too.

The woods were deep and cool. Sally, after a moment's rest, was soon swinging on branches and riding horse on the slender saplings which bent over nearly to the ground with her weight. Uncle Zeke cut and trimmed a number of poles. Then went back to the gin house, Sally along-side, and settled to work under a big water oak tree.

He made a clean cut with his ax just in the end of a pole, fitted a wedge into the gash, gave a quick blow, and the two halves fell apart, smooth and straight. These he also split, then skinned off the bark and looked approvingly at his neat work. Sally picked up a piece and tried to bend it.

"But, Uncle Zeke, I don't see how you can make a basket out of such a thick piece."

"Jes' hold your hosses, chile," he grunted. "I ain't 'gun to git dem splits out, but I is now."

With that he took from his pocket a big jackknife, tested the blade on his thumb; then he plunged it into the end of a piece of wood, gave a quick little twist, a pull, and off came a thin, even strip of wood the

full width and length of the piece. Another followed, then another, till the ground was covered with the white flexible strips. Some were as small as cords, others as wide as an inch and a half.

"Do let me make some," begged Sally, but when she tried, the pieces were too thick, or so thin they pulled off halfway down, or wider in one place than another, so she gave it up and watched Uncle Zeke admiringly.

Sally came home to dinner bubbling with such enthusiasm that the boys caught it too.

"I know how to make baskets. I reckon I'd better go help," said Richard.

"So will I go help Uncle Zeke," said Van.

"I reckon me an' Henry can make baskets as good as anybody," said John, Jr.

So when the old darkey went back to his task that afternoon, a considerable escort attended him.

As Uncle Louis passed the gin house an hour or so later, there sat Uncle Zeke, the respected center of an earnest circle, lording it over them in great style.

"Law; chile, dat ain't no way ter do," he was saying to Sally.

Uncle Louis hastily moved on before they spied him, to avoid breaking the spell, as Uncle Zeke, un-

aware, continued: "Now, jes' watch me an do it dis er-way."

He took a number of wide splints, lapped the ends, and tied them together strongly with a thong of wood about the size of a string, so that they looked like the spokes of a big wheel. He wove small pieces in and out till the bottom was the right size, and then he bent the splints upward, adding new ones as needed to make the sides solid enough. He wove other wide splints round and round till the basket was deep enough; then around the top he put a stronger piece of wood, tied also with a thong of wood. Over this he bent the up-and-down splints, slipping the ends back under the splints which went around. This made a strong rim.

But he had to stop many times, for nobody would watch, and everyone wanted to start right away on his own basket, so Uncle Zeke's skilled fingers were often needed. However, each of his pupils did finish one, though Richard had to do most of Van's.

Sally's basket was just a bit lopsided, but she made it all herself except the handle. She scraped the splints with a piece of broken glass till they were smooth, then colored some brown with walnut hulls, others a purple-red with pokeberry juice. The boys refused to take so much trouble with theirs.

The gin house was the center of attraction for several days. There was a lull on the plantation just then; besides, Uncle Zeke was a fine story-teller and loved to talk about the war and the old slavery days. All went well for quite awhile; then one morning Thomas found Sally and the boys scrambling in and out of the baskets, tumbling them about and mixing them up, while Uncle Zeke called angrily:

"Ef y'all don't 'have yerse'fs en let dem baskits erlone, I'se gwine ter take one er dese splits en gib ebbery one er yo' chilluns what Patty gib de drum!"

That ended the basket school, for Thomas sent them scooting off home in a jiffy so that Uncle Zeke could get down to real business.

As they came across the gin-house field a gleam of white caught Sally's eye. She gave a quick dash, and sure enough, near the ground, was one wide-open boll, though all the others were still tight. She waved it back at the boys in triumph, then fairly flew to the big house. Uncle Louis was just starting to town, but Sally's shout stopped him.

"And then we had a rejoiceful time," Sally told Auntie later. "I really did forget, Auntie, that I was barefooted and just had my checked apron on when Uncle Louis said I could go with him, and so did he. But I don't believe a soul noticed me—they were all



too busy talking about the cotton, 'cause we did beat everybody again."

For the trip was a great success, and White Hills again a winner.

"Now," said Uncle Louis, as they rode home,

"now, we must have the first bale of cotton, sweetheart."

"We sure will," Sally promised. "I'll pick it all myself, Uncle Louis."

In a short time the cotton began to open slowly. White Hills *did* have the first bale, though Sally did not pick it, much to her disappointment. It was auctioned off to the cotton buyers, as was the custom and brought a fancy price, which went to Aunty for her new carpet fund. The county paper had quite a lot to say about all this winning at White Hills, and Sally showed it to Dan in triumph.

"There, Dan, I told you I was going to get my name in the paper too, an' here it is!"

There was a fine crop ahead, too. After all, the bugs and worms and grasshoppers had not eaten all of it, nor had the rain ruined it nor the sun burned it up. The corn was good, too, and the hands had just time enough to pull and shock the fodder before the cotton rush came.

Meanwhile, on the plantation things were made ready. Uncle Zeke, left in peace, finished the baskets. Mr. Roan put the gin in fine shape and told off his helpers. High box sides were put on the wagons, and Richard, who was Uncle Louis's right hand now, learned to keep the pick record.

In the quiet fields the cotton growing, blossoming, snow bearing, all at once—was a sight to behold. Then presently there came a stir which grew and spread in all directions.

The big time at White Hills was on!

CHAPTER XIII

KING COTTON'S BIG TIME

ARE all hands ready to take to the cotton patch?" asked Uncle Louis one morning early in September.

"I am," said Sally.

"So'm I," echoed Van.

"I wuz jes' fixin' fer ter ax mistis 'bout lettin' me go," said Lou.

"That's fine, for cotton's opening so fast now we can't keep up with it, and I hate to leave it in the field long," said Uncle Louis.

"Why are you in such a hurry, Uncle Louis?" Sally wanted to know.

"Good reason why," said he. "Cotton's mighty precious stuff, and the quicker it's picked the cleaner and softer it is and the better the price we can get. Dust or wind or rain or dew make it dingy and packed down, so I sure do need every picker I can get my hands on."

Each following day his need grew greater, for faster and faster the heavy bolls opened, until the fields

began to look snow covered, and White Hills seemed well named indeed.

Each day too, more and more pickers from town and plantation hurried to the fields, till everybody, big and little, was there.

"Everybody," said Sally disappointedly, "but me. I never thought, Aunty, I couldn't pick and make some money too! I was counting on it for Christmas."

"You can make some money right here helping me," said Aunty. For she had no servants now except old Aunt Dilsey, who came to fill in till this picking rush was over.

The children did help valiantly; but it wasn't the same. They missed Lou, and the big house seemed very lonesome. Even Uncle Louis and Richard were away most of the time and came in too tired to talk or play.

"Please, ma'am," begged Sally over and over, but the weather was fairly sizzling, so Aunty refused.

Finally, one afternoon Uncle Louis let them go with him on Ned to try picking for awhile. Sally took her own little basket reluctantly, for Uncle Louis said it was quite big enough.

"I know I can fill the biggest one Uncle Zeke made," she insisted, as they rode off.

When they came to the field Lou was nowhere to be seen, though there were other friends scattered here

and there. Jerry, who was picking into a long sack, waved a big torn hat at them. Others, dragging baskets along with them between the rows as they picked, called a hearty welcome. Then in a moment Lou came running out. The tall cotton had hidden her. She was so glad to see them, and they went eagerly with her to work. Lou was a fast little picker, and her slender brown fingers seemed to make the cotton fairly jump out of the bolls into her basket. It did look very easy to pick cotton. But it wasn't. Afterward Sally told her aunt all about it.

"It's awf'ly hard work, Auntie," she said. "I don't see how Lou goes so fast. You see you have to get your hand over all the cotton hanging out of the boll at once and twist it and jerk it out. The mean ol' boll won't turn loose at the bottom and it catches the cotton with its points and hurts your fingers, too. You get trash in your basket and most break your back to get at the low bolls. And your basket's so heavy to tote, and the sun's so hot!"

Van had enough in a few minutes, and when he saw his uncle turning back he dropped his basket and ran to the road.

"I want to go home, Uncle Louis! I am so thirsty," he called.

But Sally would not give up. Little rivulets ran

down her neck and back. Her face was red as a beet, and for once she was glad to keep her sunbonnet on. When Lou tried to slip some cotton into the little basket which filled so slowly she said:

"No, I want to fill my own basket, even if it is awful big!"

And she did, trudging bravely along with Lou most of the time.

All around her the darkies were clearing plant after plant, row after row. They came to the field early in the morning, just as soon as the worst of the dew was off, for cotton should not be picked while damp. They worked all day, except for the noon rest, in the hot sun. But everybody, except Sally, seemed to be having a pleasant enough time. They liked the fun of being together in the fields; they were trained to this work, so it did not seem over hard to them. Then they made such high wages that neither the burning sun of September nor the raw, chilly days of late fall could keep them out of the fields.

Suddenly wild yells sounded through the peaceful air, and leaping like the wild chamois of Aunty's song came a long-legged, lean boy! Over the cotton plant and down the road as fast as he could go he fled, while far behind trailed fat Aunt Jinny, shaking her fists and calling at the top of her voice:

"Head 'im off, gals! Catch 'im, Jim! Jes' lem'me git a-holt o' dat no-count low-down, triflin' t'ief!"

She had caught Bill in the very act of stealing her cotton! His bad luck continued, for just as he was almost out of reach Aunt Jinny's Jim, down at the far end of the field, ran out to the turning row, made a dive at the flying legs, and down together in the dust rolled the two boys! It was a grand fight, and the pickers all came running out to see the fun, calling encouragement to Jim.

"Hol' his legs, boy! Git on top ob 'im, dat's right!"

Aunt Jinny came puffing up in a minute, and Bill's troubles increased when she got hold of his kinky wool. He bawled dismally and begged for help, but nobody took his part, and he was a sore, crestfallen darkey. Besides being beaten, he lost all of his cotton too. Aunt Jinny claimed it and said he had been asleep all day instead of picking.

"Yo' sho' did git dat nigger dis time, Aunty Jinny," called Jerry approvingly, for Bill had been suspected of being light-fingered before.

Then everybody went back to work again, laughing and talking, calling to each other across the rows.

After a while they began to sing, and Sally sang with them. The music was so sweet it made them forget they were hot and tired. Hannah led, her high

clear voice floating out over the wide cotton fields.

"Swing low, sweet chariot!" she trilled.

"Comin' for to carry me home," chanted all the others.

As the song went on, Sally seemed to see a golden chariot swing out of the shining sky, and perhaps the others did, too.

By and by the sun began to drop quite low in the west. Most of the open cotton was gone from the plants and was now piled in big baskets. Soon the wagons, each pulled by four strong mules, drove down the sandy road and stood waiting to haul the cotton to the gin as soon as it was weighed. Uncle Louis, Tom Brown, and Richard followed on horseback.

In came the darkies from the field, dragging their heavy burdens; yellow Jim and Jane; wrinkled old Aunt Cindy, who could still pick with the best of them; fat Aunt Viney, very proud of herself; huge black Sam; pretty coffee-colored Liza, the belle of the plantation; gingerbread Betsy; slender brown Lou; little black Billy, and all the others. With them came one red-cheeked little white girl.

All were very weary now, so they dropped down on the cotton or stretched out on the ground to rest. Big Sam, Jerry, and Jim Andy, who were the fastest



pickers and always raced with each other, sat in front. They joked and boasted while the others listened and laughed.

Then Uncle Louis opened his book with all the names of the pickers written in it, and suddenly there was quiet. Everyone wanted to know what the pick

was as each was paid for the amount of cotton he picked, and this was not ever the same. Some hands were faster than others; some days were better than others; and some fields were easier to pick than others, so weighing up was the big moment of the day!

"Jane Lyle," read out Uncle Louis.

"Heah me!" said Jane. Up swung her basket on the hook of the field steel-yard.

"One hundred and ten pounds," said Tom Brown, as he looked at the scale.

Uncle Louis said, "Pretty fair, Jane."

"Ike Jemison, 230 pounds." Tom paused, looked at the basket, then at Ike, who looked very, very innocent indeed.

"Any rocks in that basket?" asked Tom. "It's mighty heavy."

"Naw-sah! I ain't nebber put nothin' in my baskit, Mr. Tom, dat cotton's jes' packed down."

"Better see," signaled Uncle Louis, so Tom dumped the cotton out, and a loud laugh went round, for the cotton was soaking wet all through the middle part and twice as heavy as it should be. Ike looked at it in great surprise.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake!" he exclaimed. "How come dat water got in my baskit? Somebody sho' musta

played trick on me, Mars' Louis. I ain't seen no water no whar." Here the laughter grew into shouts, for out of the cotton field trotted Ike's hound dog, toting in his mouth a large tin bucket which he dropped at Ike's feet. Then wagged his stumpy tail proudly as one who deserved praise for recovering his master's property.

"Wha' yo' got dat buckit, Dawg?" called Ike sternly. "Dat's Calline's buckit, go gin it ter her."

"Shet yo' mouf, nigger," called the insulted Calline, "er-tryin' ter put yer meanness off onter me. Ain't us seen him pour water in he cotton baskit outen dat same buckit, Lize?"

"Us sho' did," said Liza, "en dat's de trufe, Mars Louis."

"Mars' Louis," began Ike, but Tom said:

"Hard luck, Ike, the gals seem against you."

"Quiet now. Richard, put down 110 pounds for Ike," added Uncle Louis, and the weighing went on again.

"Big Bill Lyle, 310 pounds. Fine, Bill!

"Little Billy Lyle, 30 pounds. Why, Billy, you'll soon be as fast a picker as your daddy."

Then Uncle Louis looked at Sally, and just for fun he called:

"Little Miss Sally Lyle."

And when she came up Tom popped her, basket and all, in one of the big baskets which he swung up on the scale.

"Seventy-five pounds," he said, and all the darkies shouted and clapped for the "li'l' missey."

"Bet Mars' Louis ain' gwine ter sell dat cotton to *nobody*," called one.

"Dat sho' am de fines' cotton eber picked on dis plantation," said another.

But this nonsense did not suit Sally at all.

"I want my *very own* cotton weighed by itself," she said.

So Tom did as she wanted, and it was just six pounds, which he said was good work for a new picker.

Then at last Uncle Louis called, "Jim Andy!"

How everyone listened!

"Four hundred and twenty-three pounds," sang out Tom.

Loud whoops came from Jim Andy's friends.

"Jerry, 411 pounds."

All Jerry's stand-bys groaned.

"Big Sam; 418 pounds."

Sam got many cheers too. Jim Andy was ahead to-day, but the other two were still boasting loudly:

"Nemmine, niggers, jes' wait till *I* gits *my* pickin'!

han' in," while their followers pushed and jostled each other, till several squabbles were going!

Sally and Lou rode back on the last cotton wagon. The darkies, with baskets on back or head, followed slowly down the road. Such a motley crowd, barefooted, in worn jeans or homespun, with old torn hats or floppy sunbonnets! Some had gay patches of red and blue on faded garments. Others had patches of bare brown or yellow or black skin, shining through their ragged clothes. But who cared? It was cotton-picking time, and they would soon have money for new clothes and other good things.



CHAPTER XIV

BR'ER 'POSSUM'S PARTY

UNCLE LOUIS," said Henry, one Saturday, "do you know Richard has never been on a 'possum hunt in his life?"

"Is that so?" exclaimed Uncle Louis. "Why, the poor boy! Of course, he's hunted bears and deer and mountain lions and other such small game, but never a 'possum! Now we must see to it right away—was that your idea, Henry?"

Henry grinned.

"Yes, sir, we thought it would be fun, 'cause it's moonlight, an' it's turned nice and warm. Cousin John Louis says he'll go with us; an' Alex will too, if you don't care."

"Go right on," said Uncle Louis, so Henry hurried off with the good news.

"What about the dog?" asked Cousin John Louis, and just about this time Sally came by.

"What are you-all going to do with dogs?" she wanted to know.

"We're goin' 'possum huntin' to-night," answered Henry.

"Who's going?" Sally asked.

"Jes' all us boys," said John, Jr., airily.

"I want to go too," said Sally. "Can't I, Cousin John Louis?"

"Well, let's see what Aunty says," he countered, so Sally went straight to headquarters.

"Oh, Aunty, the boys are going 'possum hunting to-night. Can't I go too?"

"Why, darling, girls don't go on 'possum hunts. That's only for the boys and Negroes. It's too hard a trip, besides," said Aunty.

"But I do everything else the boys do. John, Jr.'s going, and you know, Aunty, I can outride and outwalk him both. Cousin John Louis and Alex are going too, so I'll be all right. Please, please, ma'am, let me. I *do* want to go so bad!" Sally's voice was full of longing, and Cousin John Louis, who had come on up to the house, added:

"I'll look out for Sally, Aunty, if you'll let her try it," for he was very fond of his small cousin and couldn't bear to have her disappointed.

Aunty hesitated; then her ideals for ladylike little girls were too much for her. Sally really must not run wild, she thought.

"No, I'm sorry, dear, but I can't let you go." Her voice was final, and Sally hastily departed to hide her tears behind the smoke house. Suddenly, however, the shower ceased.

"It isn't fair," she said rebelliously, "just 'cause I'm a girl, and I don't b'lieve Aunty'll mind much. Anyway, I don't care, I'm just going to slip out and go with them."

Her plan grew rapidly, and in a moment Sally was having a grand time, as she thought of the delightful heroines in books who ran away. First a note—run-aways *always* left notes—to Aunty. She wrote it quickly:

DEAR AUNTY:

I've gone 'possum hunting with the boys. I'll take my punishment like a man. Please forgive me.

Your devoted niece,

SALLY.

She read it over and thought it sounded very well.

"I'll start out for a ride on Daisy after supper and just go on to the field where the boys turn off, and wait. It's too far to come back by myself, and they'll have to take me along. Won't they be mad, though!" and she gave a small giggle to herself.

It really worked almost too easily. Dilsey had an early supper. While the boys were getting axes, hatchets, and pine for torches, Sally, who often took a little ride after supper, mounted Daisy and started off down the road without a word.

"Sally dear," called Aunty, "if you want to stop by the Roans' for a visit, you may. Mr. Roan will bring you home, for he is coming up to see your uncle later."

"We'll tell you *all* about the 'possum hunt tomorrow, Sally!" shouted John, Jr., in a most superior voice.

"Shut up, you young rascal," muttered Richard, half the joy of the 'possum hunt gone for him because Sally was left out.

But Sally was out of hearing and in great spirits.

As she passed old Uncle Bill's cabin, not far from the woods, she decided to leave Daisy there. Uncle Bill was an old darkey who lived by himself. He wasn't at home—he happened to be out 'possum hunting himself—but she tied Daisy safely in the shed and ran on across the field to her waiting place, at the edge of the woods.

She watched the sun go down and listened to the good-night calls and songs of the birds. Just as the dusk was gathering thickly, the round beaming face

of the man in the moon came above the trees. He seemed to promise a perfect night for a lark, and Sally joyfully waved to him.

Soon after, she heard voices and barking, and, when a few moments later the jolly crowd came to the cut-off, a small but triumphant figure stepped forward and said:

"Hello boys, you're awful slow. I've been waiting such a long time."

They *were* utterly taken aback, all of them! Then a clamor arose, as the younger boys protested violently. Alex snickered admiringly. "Trus' li'l' missey ter git de best ob um," he muttered, and Cousin John Louis covered his own grin.

They stood and argued several minutes. Nobody who *could* be spared, *would* go home with her. Either Sally must go, or they must give up their 'possum hunt. Of course, in the end they decided to take her, and jubilant Sally cast remorse to the winds, left the future to take care of itself, and had a gorgeous time.

What a night! Warm and sweet, the sky a deep blue, while flooding the fields and creeping down through the trees was the soft radiance of the glorious full moon. The crowd plunged into the woods, and the hunt was really on. Such a chorus—old Jim's deep bass, Spot's falsetto, Rover's mellow tenor, the

other varying voices—as the yelping, barking dogs darted into the mysterious shadows, dashing in and out, to and fro, joyously seeking Br'er 'Possum! Behind followed the equally excited hunters, calling to the dogs or shouting just for fun. Even quiet Richard forgot himself and shouted with the best of them.

For an hour or so, they roamed through the enchanting woodland, stopping now and then to swing on a long grapevine or a low-hanging limb. At last came the long-awaited signal. Spot gave shrill notice that he had found a 'possum! The other dogs took up the cry, and the boys and Sally followed suit.

"Sic 'em, Spot!" "Pick up that trail, Bill!" "Tree dat 'possum quick, dog!" "Hooray-a-ay!" the boys yelled madly as they dashed down the hill toward the yelping pack.

Down in a little hollow they found all the dogs barking and jumping about a slender hickory tree. It was very dark, so Alex lighted several of the fat pine torches and gave them to the boys to hold as they peered upward to see what the dogs had treed.

"Shine he's eyes, Sol. Dar he!" called Alex.

Yes, there he was, a good-sized 'possum, about half-way up. The boys shook the tree, but the 'possum clung tight.

"I reckon us better cut dat tree down," said Alex.

In a few moments the tree was down, and the 'possum lay stretched out on the ground, quite dead, it seemed.

"Oh, dear," said Sally, "the fall's killed him."

The boys shouted with laughter.

"Don't you believe it, honey," said Cousin John Louis. "He's alive and just playing 'possum himself and trying to fool us."

Alex cut a stout pole about four feet long and made a hole near the end with one corner of his ax. Through this hole he pushed the 'possum's long flexible tail exactly as though he were threading a needle, pulling it all the way almost to his body, till it was good and tight. Then he swung the stick over his shoulder with the grinning but disagreeable captive, who quickly climbed up on it, riding in state. He was just far enough back so that he could not bite Alex's neck as he would dearly have loved to do.

"We'd better turn back," said Cousin John Louis, so the dogs were headed homeward, and the crowd followed, their flaming torches adding new pictures at each turn.

Now the light suddenly scattered the shadows and showed a charming nook or flashed down through the bushes and caught some small animal as it hurried



*They peered upward to see what the dogs had treed.
"Shine he's eyes, Sol. Dar he!" cried Alex.*



deeper into the protecting woods. Now it fell upon the hunters, making them stand out against the darkness—a picturesque group of black boys, white boys, huge Alex, tall, slender John Louis, and one small girl. How Sally thrilled to this strange loveliness and the velvety feel of the air against her cheek!

When they were almost out of the woods, the dogs treed again. This time the 'possum was in a good sized oak tree, his tail tightly wrapped around a small limb, and on his face that famous grin which looked so pleasant but meant a good bite if you trusted it.

Sol shinned up the tree, cut off the limb, and the second 'possum was rigged up like the first. Then suddenly a new startling sound came from the rear. It was, however, only the valiant John, Jr., groaning loudly as he came trailing along, slower and slower, behind the crowd.

"What's up?" called Cousin John Louis.

"My feet hurt—I'm awfully tired," half wailed John, Jr. "I want to rest."

"Aw, there you go, baby," began Henry.

"Why, John, Jr.," said Sally sweetly, "you can't be tired really. Why, I am just ready to start out, and I'm nothin' but a girl!"

The others made fun of him too, but he kept com-

plaining till they got near Uncle Bill's cabin and then said he'd have to stop.

"I know," said Sally. "I left Daisy in the shed; poor little John, Jr., can ride her home."

So they turned in, and presently a delicious odor floated out to greet them. It made everyone feel suddenly starving. They looked in at the cabin door, and there in front of a fire hung a big fat 'possum slowly turning on a string as it cooked to a final crispness.

On the hearth in the hot ashes were many sweet potatoes and a hoe cake, while sound asleep in a big home-made rocking chair was old Uncle Bill, his whisky jug close behind him. Alex slipped in and shook the jug. It was empty. He shook Uncle Bill, who did not waken.

"Lawsy—le's uses eat dat 'possum en dem taters fo' dey burns up," said Sol.

The others chimed in, and poor old Uncle Bill's feast disappeared in a hurry.

"Le's grease Unc' Bill up," suggested Henry, "an' make him think he ate that 'possum. He's so drunk he'll never know." The crowd joyfully agreed, so they greased the old darkey's mouth and hands with a bit of skin and left the bones on the floor by him. Then they moved on homeward, the afflicted

John, Jr., on Daisy, but Sally still stepping along with the best of them, as they sang and shouted:

“Boil dat 'possum down,
An' bake dem taters brown!”

The next morning Sally slept on till nearly noon. When she waked nobody was around, so she dressed and went to hunt for Aunty and learn her fate. She began to feel a little queer.

Aunty was sewing on the veranda, and she looked gravely at Sally, who said:

“Here I am, Aunty. I can't say I'm sorry, 'cause, oh, Aunty, we did have the most scrumptious time; but I was naughty and disobedient, and I'll do whatever you say.”

But Aunty said nothing and acted as though Sally were not even there. Thus began her real punishment. Uncle Louis was all right, and they all joked about the 'possum hunt. Sally and the boys went over to see Uncle Bill and heard his tale of woe, ending with:

“En when I woke up dat 'possum and dem taters wuz gone. Dey wuz 'possum on my mouf, en 'possum on my han's, en bones on de flo' but 'clar' to goodness, chilluns, dey warn't no 'possum in dis

ol' nigger's belly; an' dat's de truf! I sho' musta been conjured!"

His young friends all sympathized, and Henry said:

"Nemmine, Uncle Bill, we got two 'possums last night, and you can have one."

"Praise de Lawd for all his marcies!" exclaimed Uncle Bill.

He told his tale far and wide. And when finally the word got around to him about the trick the boys played he didn't believe a word of it and insisted that the devil first bewitched his jug of whisky and then ate that 'possum up himself!

The children kept the other one in a chicken coop for a day, and then Alex and the black boys ate him with great satisfaction. That was the end of the 'possum hunt, except for Sally.

As for her, she was in deep distress, for Auntie didn't seem to see her or hear her speak, or know she was in the house, most of the time. One—two—three days went by, and her heart grew heavy as lead.

At last Auntie relented, and the sun came out once more upon a chastened and subdued Sally.

"Of course, Auntie, I didn't mean to be disrespectful and hurt your feelings," she said. "I just thought I

could pay up by losing something else I wanted to do. I'll never disobey you again."

And she didn't, but Aunty sighed now and then and said to Uncle Louis:

"The only trouble is, I so often can't think *what* to forbid till afterward!"

CHAPTER XV

GIN-HAND SALLY

WHERE is Thomas to-day?" asked Sally at dinner a few days after they tried picking cotton.

"Up at the gin house," said Aunty.

"Oh, goody, goody," exclaimed John, Jr., jumping up. "They've begun to gin. Let's go right now!"

Uncle Louis looked sharply at the boys and Sally.

"Now, let me tell you, if I hear of any monkey-shines around that cotton gin I'll take a hickory limb and wear it out on somebody, boy or girl! And if *anybody* goes up to the gin room without Mr. Roan I'll get another one and wear that out too."

"Honest, Uncle Louis, we won't," said Henry and John, Jr., together.

"You better go along too, Richard," said Uncle Louis. "I'll need you there later."

Thus the company started out soberly enough. Up at the gin house they found mules, wagons, and darkies, buzzing to and fro, with Mr. Roan standing

outside telling everyone what to do. The gin was singing z-z-z-z!

"Oh, Mr. Roan, we want to go upstairs right now to see the gin work. Please take us," Sally begged.

"Well, well," said he. "So you all have quit picking and come to help me. That's fine. I can always use good gin hands."

Up the steps they all climbed to a long room with an open hallway down the middle; the space on both sides was divided into bins or stalls which were partly full of seed cotton.

"We do all the ginning and baling for the neighborhood, so everybody's got a bin to keep his cotton in till we can tend to it," explained Mr. Roan, as they walked back toward the gin which was singing so steadily. It was at the far end of the room right against the wall where a hole was cut, so the back of the gin opened into the upper part of the lint room.

The children watched eagerly as the gin man fed the hungry gin, which was inside a kind of box. He hoisted a basket of cotton on top of the stand, raked it out, and then scattered it evenly by hand across the whirring saws. He surely had to watch out for his fingers! The cotton went in still clinging to its seeds, and came flying out without them, back into the lint

room like a real snowstorm, filling the air with soft, fleecy lint, till it slowly settled on the floor.

"Eli Whitney was a pretty smart man, I reckon," said Sally.

"That he was," agreed Mr. Roan. For the cotton gin was truly a wonderful machine. It had fast turning rollers: one with small circular saws set close together, the other with brushes. These were so cleverly put together that, as they whirled, the cotton was pulled from its seeds by the saws, brushed off the saws by the brushes, and then blown out of the gin by the draft made by the whirling brushes. The seed fell through a grid and then through a hole cut in the floor under the gin stand to the seed room below.

All this time hands kept coming in with great baskets of the seed cotton, which they dumped into the stalls or brought over to the gin man. Shouts and calls came from outside, so after a little, the children went over to the door to see what was going on. One of Uncle John's wagons drove up to the little platform at the front of the gin house, and the hands began unloading the cotton. Baskets were filled right in the wagon, tramped down, lifted up on the platform, and toted to the Garlands stall.

Everybody and everything was covered with cotton. The rough boards were fuzzy white with the soft cling-

ing lint. The darkies' kinky wool was snowy white, and so were even their eyebrows. The children laughed delightedly at their broad black faces shining out from under the white wigs, and the big fellows laughed back.

"Po' ol' whitehead nigger, jes' see how weakly he am!" called Peter, swinging a great cotton basket up on his shoulder as though it were nothing; then of course the others had to show off too.

Richard went back and looked at the moving belts connected with the gin.

"What makes it go?" he asked.

"There," said Mr. Roan, "we should have looked downstairs first." So back they went, this time into the large shed room at the front of the gin house.

"Oh, the big wheels are turning," squealed Sally. "Like a flyin'-ginney. Won't the mules get drunk and fall down?"

On a turning shaft which reached from floor to ceiling, a great wooden cogwheel was built sidewise, and just below this two long sweeps were also fastened to the shaft. Mules were hitched to the free end of the sweeps, and there was Sol, perched on old Bec', driving them.

As the mules moved round and round in a great circle, pulling the sweeps, other big wheels and little wheels, shafts and belts whirled round and

round too. And upstairs the fans and saws of the gin went z-z-z at their work of getting the seeds out of the cotton. For they were all connected in such a way that when one turned, the others had to follow.

"Why, it's just exactly like the old woman and her pig. You know!" exclaimed Sally.

"The fire began to burn the stick;
The stick began to beat the dog;
The dog began to bite the pig—"

Then she thought for a moment and said: "There, I'll make another tale like this:

"Sol began to drive the mules,
The mules began to pull the sweeps,
The sweeps began to turn big wheel,
Big wheel began to turn long belt——"

Here her breath gave out, and Mr. Roan had a good laugh.

"Anyway, honey, you'll be sure to get home by morning at that rate," he said.

Sally laughed too, but her tale went no farther, for they moved on. They paused for a moment to look in the lint room with its fleece-covered floor and its flying cotton; then went back of the gin house to the press. This was a big high box with a great wooden screw over head.

Out here were more mules and wagons, great rolls of cotton bagging to cover the bales, and piles of iron bands to go round them. Hands were trotting to and fro, dumping great basketloads of lint cotton into the press box, where a strip of bagging was already spread inside the box. Other hands tramped on the cotton as fast as it came in, till it was pretty well packed down.

"Just like Brother's Jack-in-the-box," said Sally. For the white wooly heads and black faces popped up over the box rim and went out of sight again as they moved around and bobbed up and down, waving their arms and grinning at the children. When the press box was full nearly to the top, out jumped the trampers.

"Let her go!" called Thomas. Jim, who drove the press mules, cracked his whip, and they started briskly around, pulling the sweeps and turning the screw. Down the screw came, pushing the heavy lid into the box and packing the cotton closer and tighter into a bale which weighed about five hundred pounds. Next they slipped narrow iron bands through grooves made inside the press box, and fastened them around the bale to keep it in shape. Then Jim drove his mules round the other way, and the lid now lifted again as the screw twisted upward. Thomas opened the door.



a darkey caught his cotton hook into the bale and tumbled it out. Last of all the bagging was sewed together at the ends of the bale, but not on the side, for the cotton buyers always wanted a sample of the cotton to see what they were getting.

"What happens next, Mr. Roan? I know 'bout the mill, but right now?" asked Richard.

"Well, sometimes one thing, sometimes another. Your uncle sells to a Mobile concern, so we ship ours right down the river. Mr. John sells his to any buyers who come to town and give him the best price, and Miss Louise's folks mostly turn theirs into the store

to pay bills. We don't always sell all ours right away, but sometimes hold it till the price goes up."

A shriek and loud squawks came from behind the shed, and two frightened darkies darted out, all ablaze for a second, while John, Jr., and Henry rolled on the ground with laughter. Dave and Bob had slipped off to have a little game of craps, and the boys saw them. Promises to Uncle Louis were forgotten, and Henry stole up close behind them with a lighted match. The cotton fuzz which covered them caught, and the flame ran over them. It was over too quickly to burn them, but they were badly scared, and so was poor little Van.

However, matches around the gin house were very dangerous, so Mr. Roan pounced on the two young rascals without a word and held them tight. He didn't wait for Uncle Louis either.

"Dave, get me a switch," he ordered, and Dave cheerfully brought a good big one and then held Henry till his turn came. Other yells were added to the noise, and when Mr. Roan said, "Now git," those boys were glad to hurry away and get started before Uncle Louis repeated the job.

After this first visit Sally and Van, too, deserted the big house. They played in the piles of cotton seed before these were hauled off to the oil mill to be made

into oil, meal, and hulls. Now and then they got a ride in the empty cotton baskets on a darkey's shoulder. Often a wagon loaded with cotton bales took them down the road a little piece till a coming-back wagon picked them up for the home trip. But most of all they rode on the mules hitched to the sweeps or on the sweeps themselves.

One day Uncle Louis came in to find Sally driving the gin mules while Sol dozed in a corner of the shed.

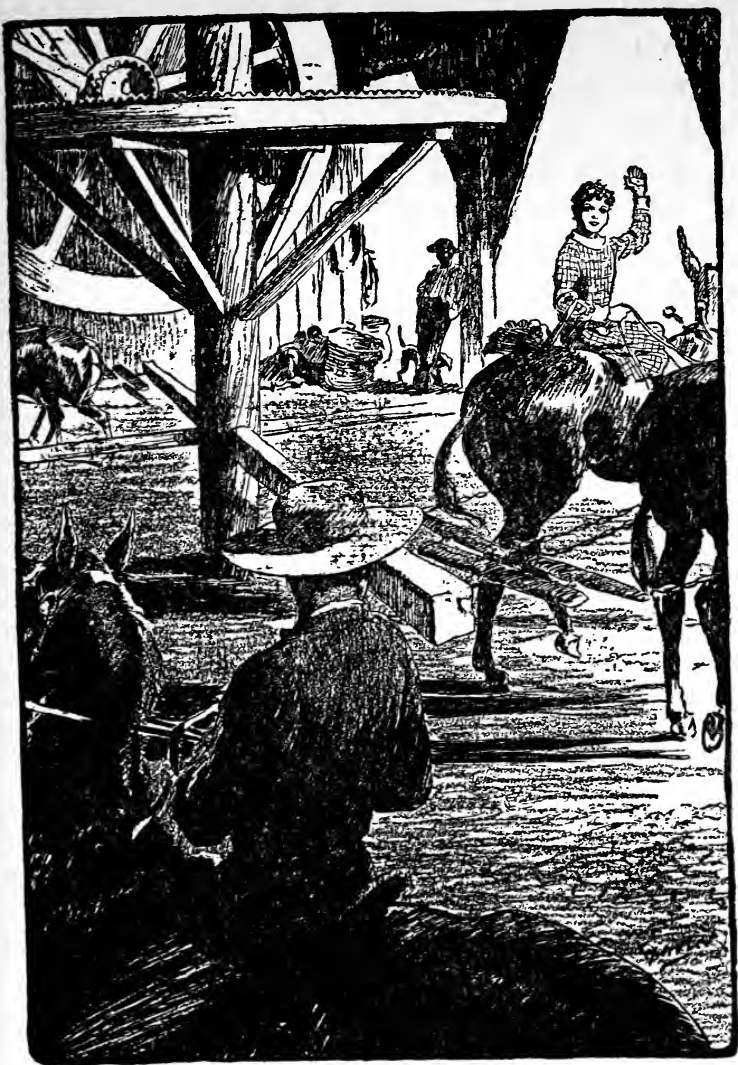
"What *will* that child do next!" he said to Mr. Roan. "I know she will be killed before her mother gets her again."

"Well, she's a sight better worker right now than that young nigger. She's a natural born horsewoman, too, so don't worry, sir," said Mr. Roan.

So Sally was left on her perch on old Bec'.

"I think ginning is much nicer work than picking," Sally told her friend one day after her shift with the mules. "And I really believe, Mr. Roan, I am a better gin hand than I am a picker."

"I couldn't ask for a better gin hand, honey," said Mr. Roan, which Sally felt was well deserved praise. She always demanded her "time," as the darkies called their pay, and Uncle Louis paid her with great solemnity, for she refused to joke about this matter.



*One day Uncle Louis came in to find Sally driving the gin
mules*



CHAPTER XVI

SALLY LOSES HER PLACE

FOR a while that fall the old gin and press did their slow work just as they had when Grandfather Lyle put them on White Hills Plantation so many years ago, and then the great change came!

It began with what seemed an ordinary letter. Uncle Louis opened it calmly, then suddenly began to wave it wildly and shouted:

"Glory be! Glory be! Here's my new engine at last!"

"Where is it, Uncle Louis?" said Van, staring eagerly around. "I don't see any engine," while the others demanded the reason for all this stir.

Finally Uncle Louis calmed down enough to explain. Before the war he had helped a roving cousin to get out to Texas, with never a word from him all these years. Now came this letter. Jack was a prosperous cattleman—here was that money with interest—he was ashamed it hadn't been sent before—come out and see him—Texas was a great place.

And the check enclosed just about completed the

sum for a new gin outfit! Uncle Louis had tried so hard to save for this, but just when he was almost ready the money was needed for something else, so there was never quite enough. Now there actually was. Everybody rejoiced with him. It didn't take long to write the order—Uncle Louis had spent too many hours looking longingly over machinery catalogues. So in an hour they all rode excitedly with him to the post office to see the letter properly mailed; then to Garlands to tell the good news.

There was still more rejoicing when the machinery came, and the ginning and baling stopped for a few days. Down came old wooden wheels and shafts and sweeps; up went the new magic-workers.

Uncle Louis had the finest gin and press in the county! And how proud of them he, Mr. Roan, and Thomas were! There was a steam engine to run the gin and press and grist mill. There was a feeder which spread the cotton evenly across the gin saws and saved the work of one man and many fingers. A condenser on the back of the gin gathered and packed the cotton lint so that it rolled smoothly out instead of flying about, and there was also a new press, placed inside the gin house near the engine.

Everything went on much faster, and one hand could do the work of three. All the Negroes from

miles around came in to see it, and many of them were afraid of the steam engine at first.

"Hit's de debbil hisse'f," they would mutter, as they backed away from this strange creature.

Sally had a bad cold, so could not come up while the work was going on; when she did come, she stood silently by Mr. Roan.

"Well, honey girl, how do you like it?" he asked. "You'll have to make a new tale about it all. Let's see——"

But Sally did not wait for him to finish.

"I don't want to make any tale about it. It's horrid and dirty and ugly!" she cried out. "And I do feel so sorry for the poor mules. I just know they can't walk straight. And I can't be a gin hand any more."

Before she knew it the tears were rolling down her cheeks and she was sobbing unhappily. Mr. Roan picked her up in his arms.

"There, there, sugar," he comforted her. "Don't you know all those mules are mighty glad to get an engine to do their work? And how *can* you find time to work at the gin with all the other fall work? I know they'll need you to help make molasses."

Sally's sobs checked. Her dimples came slowly back as she smiled through her tears.

"That's so, Mr. Roan, I will be pretty busy,"

she said. She thought a minute, then added: "I reckon it's true about everything changing, just as all the grown folks keep saying, and we'll just have to put up with it."

"You're right," said Mr. Roan, and he, too, was quiet.

For the times truly were changing at White Hills, and the old order was almost gone.

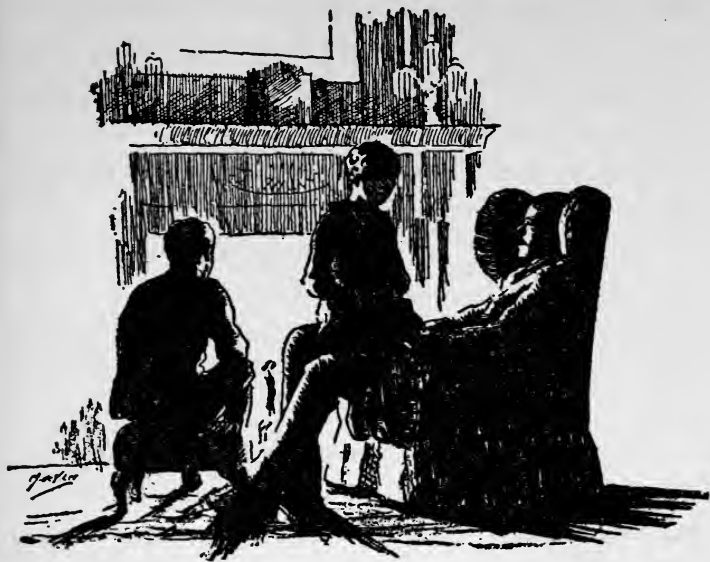
That evening at twilight Sally sat on Uncle Louis's knee with Richard near by, and they talked about it all.

"In my grandfather's time," said he, "there was no King Cotton, only a little slave child who served where needed. Nobody thought much about him. Down by the seacoast there was a kind of cotton which dropped its seeds when passed through wooden rollers, but there wasn't much of this. So the seeds had to be taken out of our cotton by hand, and this was slow, tiresome work. It took a man a whole day to get one pound of lint cotton ready to spin."

Sally nodded.

"I know," she said. "I tried to pick 'em out enough cotton to make a mattress for my dolly's bed."

"So," Uncle Louis went on, "only a little cotton was grown, just enough to make the clothes and things needed by the family, and not much was sold.



It was raised and seeded and spun and woven and dyed and made up all by hand, right at home, and used there, too. Then Eli Whitney invented his cotton gin, and the whole Southland was changed. The whole world, too, I reckon."

"Like magic in fairy tales?" asked Sally.

"Just exactly," answered Uncle Louis. "Over in old England, and up in New England, too, there were already mills for weaving cloth. They used more flax and wool because cotton was hard to get. Most of it came from India, Africa, and the West Indies.

It was the kind which was easy to get seeds from. But the mills wanted more cotton, and now we could send it to 'em, thanks to the gin. So we raised more and more and more every year.

"By and by we found Cotton was our king, and that his kingdom was spreading far and wide, as the planters moved out, like my father, to find wider fields and richer lands. Soon he was a sure mighty ruler, and he still is. And he makes us step, don't he?"

"Yes, sir-ee. Go on, Uncle Louis," said Sally, and Richard, too, nodded eagerly.

"Well, the world kept calling for more cotton all the time, and we had to have gins which worked faster, so people kept thinking up new machinery and ways to help. First the gins were small and were worked by hand. Soon someone thought of having a horse to make them go. Then they were made larger and more horses were used, till they were like our old mule gin. Next someone else used the steam engine instead of horses. New parts keep on being added, and now just look at our new gin! They tell me that it won't be long now before the cotton will be taken right out of wagon and passed on through the gin and press too, without being touched.

"It's the same with the press and baler. At first they hung a big bag through a hole in the floor and filled

it with cotton. The hands tramped it down and then packed it with big heavy clubs as tight as they could. When that old wooden screw press of ours was built, your grandfather was as proud as I am now of my new baler. By the time you are a man, Richard, there's no telling what sort of wonder workers you'll have in the gin house!

"Then look at the compress! This packs our regular size bales till they are only half as big, and so take up less room on the trains or boats for the long trips.

"We used to dump the cotton seeds in the gulleys or streams. Anything to get rid of 'em. Now we sell 'em, if the mills are near enough, for there are machines to take off the close-sticking lint left on the seeds, and hull them, and press out the oil, and grind what's left of the inside into meal. We have all kinds of food for the stock, and fertilizer for the crops, besides the oil for many things. Other machines make the lint into mattresses and rope and no telling what else.

"We've got machine tools now which plant cotton and cultivate cotton, and they are getting better every year. Some day we'll have one that picks cotton, just see if we don't!"

Here Uncle Louis quite forgot he was talking to the children, but he was so excited over all the wonders

that machines could and might do that they felt quite thrilled, too.

"Why, Uncle Louis!" Sally exclaimed. "I 'most believe it'll be 'King Machine' next."

"I reckon maybe you're right, honey," he said.

The three dreamers looked silently into the blazing fire, where Sally watched tiny wheels and belts and saws, all whirling and twisting in the dancing flames and the blue smoke, as it curled up the chimney. They started when the supper bell sounded and Van came jumping in.

"Hurry up, Sister and Richard. Come on quick, Uncle Louis. Supper's on the table!" he called.

CHAPTER XVII

GOLDEN DAYS

SUCH weather! All soft and lazy and golden; just right for frolicking, but mighty poor for working. And yet everything at White Hills seemed to need help all of a sudden.

"This is worse than running a circus!" said Uncle Louis, as one job after another kept popping up. "Well, we'll all have to pitch in and do the best we can."

Everyone did. Sally and Van shelled quarts and quarts of dried butter beans and cow peas; and they made strings of red pepper and tied the dry sage in bags. They gathered their popcorn and picked the goobers from the wide tangle of roots after Alex plowed up the plants.

Richard and Sol forked up the sweet potatoes and banked them, when dry, for winter keeping. They dug a shallow pit in the sloping ground by the smoke house where the water quickly drained off. Here the potatoes were tucked in between thick

layers of corn stalks and dry pine needles, and finally covered with earth.

Uncle Louis came by and suggested.

"You folks better bed up the seed sugar cane too. It wouldn't surprise me to have a killing frost any time now." So the pretty striped stalks of ribbon cane also went into pits, and were protected in the same way till planting time in the spring.

In the meantime some of the hands had to stop picking cotton long enough to get the corn in from the fields where it had been curing since August. Then the next moonlight Saturday night the darkies made a frolic of shucking it.

"Don't get too rough," Uncle Louis warned, when he came down to see them start, "and no shooting or razors, or I'll bring my own gun down."

"Naw, sir," chorused the crowd, but there wasn't much sleep at the big house that night.

However the corn *did* get shucked, which was very important just at this busy time of the year.

'Zekiel and Nathan Joe, famous singers and leaders, first chose sides to race against each other. Then they mounted the corn pile and laid a rail along the top to divide it exactly in half. After much arguing and a few fights everyone agreed it was in the right place, and the signal was given.



Such a hubbub followed as the workers tore open the shucks, twisted out the ears and tossed them aside in piles. Yells of triumph; calls of cheating; threats of vengeance for real or fancied blows; songs, chants, or shouts of encouragement, swelled into noise that spread far and wide.

Each side was up to all kinds of tricks to slip the rail across the middle line or throw corn over on the opposite side, so Nathan and 'Zekiel had no easy or

safe task. For they had to watch the rail and the shuckers too, and also dodge the flying ears of corn. They led the singing and urged their followers on to victory, sometimes making up all kinds of words or tunes, which the crowd chanted back; sometimes leading real songs. The shuckers worked faster and faster, till they were going like mad! The amount of corn shucked was almost beyond belief.

Up at the big house Sally, who kept waking up every now and then, tapped her foot sleepily as she caught her favorite song, sung very fast.

General: Rabbit in de garden,

All: Rabbit, hi, oh!

General: Dog can't ketch 'im,

All: Rabbit, hi, oh!

General: Gun can't shoot 'im,

All: Rabbit, hi, oh!

General: Man can't skin 'im,

All: Rabbit, hi, oh!

General: Cook can't cook 'im,

All: Rabbit, hi, oh!

General: Folks can't eat 'im,

All: Rabbit, hi, oh!

About midnight someone on Nathan's side pounded in triumph upon the jug of whisky buried at

the bottom of the corn pile, and the race was won! Then followed their promised supper. Afterward the crowd danced, wrestled, sang, and carried on till sun-up on Sunday morning.

"De debbil sho' am gwine ter git dem sinners," said Uncle Tom to Aunt Dilsey, but the sinners didn't seem to care. Instead they seemed proud of the cuts and bruises, and all bragged about their great prowess.

No sooner was the corn in the cribs than word came that Uncle 'Lasses Jim and his crew wanted to make sirup right away. So the sorghum and sugar canes were stripped, chopped down with heavy hoes, topped, and hauled in, as quickly as possible.

The mill, a rough home-made contraption rather like a huge clothes wringer turned sidewise, was turned by a mule sweep. So Sally joyfully returned to do her shift of driving old Bec'. Sol and Richard took turns in feeding the cane between the turning rollers, which crushed out thin greenish juice and sent it through a little trough into a tub below. Uncle 'Lasses Jim and his helpers strained the juice into iron pots and boiled it slowly for hours. They skimmed off the green scum which kept rising to the top and watched patiently till the stuff was clear and just thick enough to dip into the waiting barrels.

"Can't you hurry it up, Uncle 'Lasses Jim?" asked Sally impatiently as she hovered near the furnace.

"Lawsy, chile, ain't you never hear'n tell 'bout slow as 'lasses?" he chuckled. "En' it gits bitter as gall ef it's hasted too fas'!"

One night the young darkies begged a candy pulling from Uncle Louis.

"Us ain't gwine ter hab no meanness and car'y' in' on like dem low-down cawn-shuckin' niggers," promised Betsy and Liza. "Us is de quality cullud fo'kes what's comin', Mars' Louis." So Uncle Louis agreed. And this time the white children and all the small darkies were on hand to see the fun, clapping and begging for tastes.

Each couple had a big ball of candy which they pulled together, dancing to and fro, singing and swaying in the flaring light of the pine knots, which burned on high earth-covered posts. They stretched the shining golden-brown ropes of candy sometimes for fifteen or more feet. Then gathered it up in loops as they swung back together, every pair trying to pull the longest strand without a break, and the whitest candy.

Cane grinding brought on other festivities. The boys appeared promptly, and much gay company

came over to drink the thin sweet juice and have pic-nics in the grove. All the children had a grand time. They drank so much cane juice that Dilsey said she knew they would soon pop open. Then, for a change, they peeled and chewed such quantities of the sweet ribbon cane that Uncle Louis called them the Billy goats and threatened to send them to the pasture. They scraped off and devoured the delicious molasses sugar which had formed on the inside of the empty barrels waiting to be refilled. They begged chunks of the hot candied molasses left in the bottom of the pots and ate much of this. The door knobs were all sticky, and Uncle Louis, in a fresh suit, sat down on a fat lump left on his favorite chair, which made him very angry indeed.

"Where is the young rascal who did this?" he called and Van ran in a hurry and hid behind the smoke house till Uncle Louis had time to get over it.

Finally Sally cried half one night with the stomach ache and next morning eyed the sirup pitcher with distaste, as she said:

"Aunty, I don't like molasses, not one bit."

"Neither do we," agreed all the boys.

"I declare," said Uncle Louis, as the last barrel of molasses went rolling into the storeroom, "I sure

do feel exactly like I'd been through that sirup mill myself."

"What makes you work so hard doin' all this, Father?" asked Richard, looking up into his tired face. "Uncle John says its cheaper to buy corn and meat and molasses than to raise it, and that cotton's all that pays."

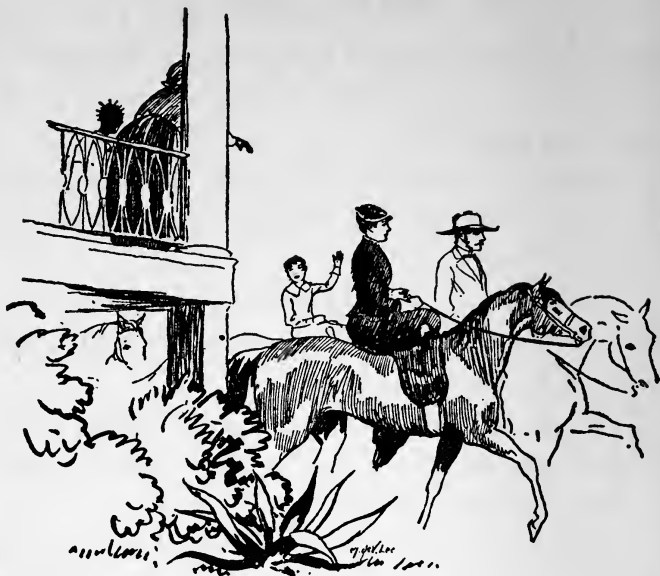
"Maybe so," said Uncle Louis, "but John's got a mortgage on Garlands, and White Hills is free from debt; we've got some fine cows and horses and pigs too, which is more than he has. And I notice he and Sister and their niggers send their cct-ton over here to be ginned, and they borrow my harrow and new tools instead of the other way round. I notice, too, the only man round here really making money is old Sam Welch—poor white trash we called him before the war—who has the store where they trade. So I reckon we'll keep our supplies and raise our living at home and our cotton as our extra crop. We may not have as much money good years, but we don't lose as much bad ones."

Richard thought for a moment; then he said:

"I heard a man say the other day you always seemed to have such luck. He didn't see how you could manage to hold your cotton for better prices an' where you got the money to buy all your new

stuff; but I can see there ain't any luck about it."

"Well, I sure did have some mighty good luck when I got such a smart son," grinned Uncle Louis, and the pair walked back to the house, greatly satisfied with each other!



CHAPTER XVIII

RIVER CAMP

WHEW-EE!" said Uncle Louis the next day, when a moment of peace seemed to have fallen upon White Hills. "I reckon we're over the worst for a while, anyway. Seems to me I've got to go on a spree! Who's got an idea?"

Aunty smiled.

"Why, everything's settled," she said. "Jennie and I've been planning for a week or so to go camping

over at the river just as soon as work lightened up out here. We are to meet there to-morrow, if the weather is good."

"Well," exclaimed Uncle Louis, "you two ladies *are* a pair! I suppose the supplies are all packed and the guns ready?"

"Guns, indeed——" began Aunty, but Uncle Louis was off, so she turned to Sally, who was fairly dancing with excitement as she urged:

"Oh, Aunty, can we go, and will Bess be there? Please hurry up an' tell me, or I'll pop wide open!"

"Yes, darling, both times," said Aunty.

"Oh, goody, goody, goody!" chanted Sally, as she whirled herself at Aunty with a bear hug and flew wildly off to tell Richard and Van the news.

Early the next morning Thomas and Sol started with the pack mules and the hunting dogs. Later the others followed on horseback, trotting briskly down the big road; passing many cotton-laden wagons on their way. By and by they turned off into a rough path which soon became a winding trail, leading them deeper and deeper into the woods.

On and on they rode, through the great pines for a time; then under trees which spread a glowing roof overhead and sent soft showers of bright leaves down upon the riders.

Tiny wood creatures trotted across the path; squirrels chattered and scolded the crows and jays, who sauced them back without mincing matters in the least.

Sally and Richard rode on in front together.

"It isn't like your mountains one bit, is it, Richard?" asked Sally, as they reigned up for a moment to rest the horses at the top of a hill.

He shook his head.

"No. The air's so different, and these hills are so little, and there ain't any waterfalls or tumbling brooks. It's fine here, but I'd give a heap for just a sight of mountains sometimes, Sally. We'd have to climb if we were there. Jim Crow and Daisy could never get up those rocks and steep sides."

"Well, that would be fun, too. Sometime we'll go there, Richard, and play in the brooks, and climb up, up, to the sky," said Sally. "When I go home and you come to see us, we'll just do it. The mountains aren't so far from where we live, and I know Father will take us. Oh, Richard, don't we have good times, and isn't it nice to be cousins!" And she smiled at him in friendly content.

"It sure is," Richard smiled back.

Just ahead were Thomas and Sol and the mules, so they dashed past in great style, the horses prancing

and tossing their heads as if they quite scorned the slow mules and enjoyed the fun of leaving them behind. The dogs barked madly and pulled at their leashes as they tried to follow, and Sol called after them:

"Das all right, das all right, us sho' has got all de vittles, jes' de same!"

It was midafternoon when they came into the clearing where two log cabins perched high on a hill. Down below they saw their own creek join the sweeping yellow river with its arms of swampy backwater and fringes of canebrake.

"Oh, there's a bonfire," said Van, and in another moment a small avalanche came rushing toward them.

"We beat you, we beat you!" shouted Bess, Tom, Will Howard, and Bob all at once.

Sally fairly tumbled off Daisy. Richard followed more slowly, and the children disappeared into the woods, till the smell of cooking food brought them back to camp.

Hot coffee, fried bacon, and hot hoeecake were added to the good things from home, and a starving crowd fell upon the food. This disappeared at such a rate that Sol began to feel a little worried about his share, but he, too, feasted when his time came.

The older people were to sleep inside the cabins, but the boys wanted to stay outside, so they made high leaf piles and covered them with quilts. Bess and Sally had quite a time deciding what to do.

"'Fraid cats," taunted the boys, but finally the house won out. After everything was still, however, Sally suddenly found herself wide awake. She turned over and shook Bess.

"Let's go out," she whispered.

So out they crept. It was quiet and lovely, with soft wood sounds and water sounds floating over to meet each other. The fire was burning low, with bright embers shining out of the ashes, and the sky was twinkling with many stars which seemed near and friendly to the two little girls. They sat close together on the cabin steps for a few moments. Then Bess said:

"I'm sleepy, but I don't want to go in. I know, let's roll Bob off his bed and sleep there. He's awful hard to wake, an' he'll never know it till to-morrow."

They did just that, and the next morning the indignant Bob found himself on the ground and two interlopers snuggled cosily down in *his* bed! He did some rolling out on his own account, without delay!

But long before that, indeed before daylight, the men, Richard with them, were off duck hunting. Richard's heart thrilled with joy. He loved the

hurried breakfast by the low camp fire, the torch which lighted their path down to the river, the slipping of their boat through the quiet water, which gurgled a little as the oars dipped and lifted.

By and by they could see each other a little more clearly. Then slowly the dusk vanished, the silver mists lifted, and the ducks were up and doing. *Pop, pop*, began the guns, and, as if in answer, up came the shining face of the sun to see what all this noise was about. Richard put down his gun and laughed aloud.

"Reckon he's sort o' surprised to find us here," he said, and the others laughed with him.

Ducks were plentiful, and the dogs retrieved well, but once while he was climbing over an old stump in the swamp, Uncle Louis almost touched a big moccasin. The angry thing was just about ready to strike, but Richard's quick eye and quicker hand were ready first. A bullet grazed Uncle Louis's boot, and the snake writhed helplessly before his astonished eyes as Richard sprang forward to finish the job.

"Heavens!" gasped Cousin Will. "That was a close shave! My hat's off to you, Richard"; and Uncle Louis quickly put his arm round the boy for a moment before they went on. But Richard only said:

"Aw, that's nothin', Father."

Back at camp the left-behinds could hardly decide what to do first.

"Let's us go shootin' too," said Will, for cottontails were kicking up their saucy heels almost at the cabin door, while coveys of quail and flocks of doves were scuttling across the clearing or flying here and there.

"No, let's go persimmon and nut huntin'," said Bob. "The woods are full of 'em round here."

"Those trees look awful nice. I'll bet you can see 'most all over the world from the top," said Sally, looking at the great vines which swung from the trees, and the broad branches which swept down almost to the ground, inviting one to climb up and up and up toward the blue sky.

"I," said Aunty, "am going to fish." That settled it, and they had a lazy, contented morning, fishing, paddling around in the rowboats and watching the cotton-laden boats pass. Just as dinner was ready, a shout came from the water.

"Seems to me I smell fried fish! Save some for me!"

They all stared, for across the river came a rowboat paddled by a darkey, and in the stern, under a huge umbrella, sat a fat red-faced man. He looked so funny they all laughed, and Cousin Jennie exclaimed:

"If that isn't Ed Carr I'm a Dutchman! I reckon he's out buying cotton alongshore."

He was, and he joined them for dinner, keeping an eye open for a southbound river boat as he ate. He was so jolly that the children begged him to stay, but he said he must hurry on, or some other buyer would get all the good cotton.

A little later the *Nancy Lee*, her wide decks piled high, docked to pick him up, boat and all. The captain greeted him warmly, while several roustabouts tumbled off the bales of cotton, where they had been asleep, and hurried to help. For the cotton buyers were very important folks to the river boats. The children followed aboard for a moment, but ran off as the *Nancy Lee* gave a warning whistle. On she went, with her load of cotton soon to go on the great sea-going ships to waiting mills in New and Old England.

When she was out of sight Bob said:

"Come on, boys, let's us go on after some birds. I'm tired of fishin'," and they too were off.

When the duck hunters came in that night with *their* fine bag of game, they found delicious fat quail broiling over the coals, and rivals ready to match tales. Nobody mentioned the snake, however, for fear it might make the ladies uneasy, though Cousin Will said:

"Richard is really a remarkable shot. He did some fancy work to-day."

Next day the men wanted to fish, but the others went nutting.

"We'll have plenty of nuts now for our Christmas cakes," said Cousin Jennie, as they sat resting and proudly looking at the treasure bags of black walnuts and scaly-bark hickory nuts.

"An' plenty to crack round the fire this winter," said Bess. "Come on, Sally, let's play"; and all of them were up again, climbing, swinging, and pelting each other with the crisp rustling leaves. They ate sweet wrinkled persimmons till they could hold no more, and then came back to camp, ready again to eat and eat and eat.

"Goodness me," said Sally, as she finished her fourth roasted sweet potato and asked for more, "I just can't get enough." And the others were all in the same boat.

As twilight came, a tiny new moon hung for a moment in the sky. It made a faint glimmer in the water and was gone. A boat came by all a-twinkle with lights which made the river sparkle, and the singing of the roustabouts came clearly across to their camp.

Then everyone gathered close around the fire to sing and tell bear stories and other exciting yarns, till all kind of queer things seemed to creep out of the

shadows. The children squealed delightedly in half-pretended fear.

There were more squeals, but not delighted ones, next morning just after breakfast when Auntie said:

"The meal is out, the bacon is gone, and this is the last of the coffee."

"Yes," said Uncle Louis, "and I'll bet Mr. Roan will send the patterollers after Thomas and Sol if we don't get back to White Hills to-day, so we ought to start pretty soon." And Cousin Jennie added:

"The children ought to be back in school, too."

"Well, *who* cares 'bout meal and lessons? *I* don't," said Sally. "Let's stay. We can live on persimmons and ducks and fish and make acorn meal like the Indians did."

Bess and her brothers agreed, but the vote was against them. Packing was soon done, the fire was carefully put out, and then they rode away, back toward the busy world waiting outside.

Soon came the first killing frost, followed by others, and golden days often turned rainy and chilly. Out on the plantation the hands picked over the fields for the second or third time, as the later bolls opened, a much harder task, fewer pickers were needed, too, so the extra help drifted away. The gin was busy as

ever, but cotton picking was about over, and everyone was glad.

Where, just a short time before, had been so much loveliness, now desolate stretches of bare dark stalks showed against the gray earth. The fields were quiet once more. Not for long, however, for even before the last cotton was picked, Uncle Louis had the hands clearing off stalks, plowing under the old growth, making ready for another crop.

CHAPTER XIX

A VERY BUSY TIME

THE first real cold snap of the season came unexpectedly after a bit of summer weather. Sally, with a red nose and chilly fingers, came in for her coat, and Thomas built a fire in the sitting room. Presently Uncle Louis hurried up from the lot with Alex and Ike and called to Aunty:

"Good hog-killing weather at last—we'd better get ready." Right away the bustle began. Aunty went flying around from one place to another, sending messages and giving directions. Big iron pots and heavy tables were moved outdoors. Dilsey scrubbed wooden tubs and the hand sausage mill. Sol and Richard were put to crushing rock salt, while the smaller darkies, Van with them, formed a lively procession as they trotted back to the rock furnace with baskets of chips and armloads of wood.

It was getting colder all the time. That night Van and Sally cuddled very close together in the big feather bed. Lou moved her pallet right on the warm hearth. By morning there was a heavy white frost

sparkling everywhere, and even a thin film of ice shivered on the water bucket out on the back porch. Everyone's breath turned to smoke in the crisp air.

The place was astir at daylight. Loud squeals from the hog pasture woke the children very early. When Sally came out she found fires burning brightly under the pots and in the outdoor furnace, while Uncle Meat Jim, Aunt Calline, and the house servants crowded about, warming themselves, talking, and laughing. Just as soon as the first wagonload of hogs drove up, the work was on in full swing. Sally climbed up on the wheel and watched two hands take a carcass by the hind legs from the wagon, plunge it head first into the scalding water of the big iron pot, quickly swing it over, catch the front legs, dip the other end in, throw it over on a low platform, and pass on to the next one. Other boys, with long knives or old blades from the scythe held in both hands, quickly scraped off all the steaming bristles.

"Oh, Jerry, do, do, *please* let me scrape awhile," begged Sally, but just here Uncle Meat Jim came up, and she turned to watch him as he split the hind legs of each hog and slipped a seasoned hickory stick under the strong sinews to hold the legs apart. Then up went the hog, to hang from a strong bar, fastened between two trees, while Uncle Jim's sharp

knife flashed quickly in the morning sunshine. By and by a long row of neatly split-open carcasses swung, clean and white, till they were firm and cool and ready to cut up.

"Ax Unc' Jim fer some er dem pig tails," whispered Mandy, and when Sally had her hands full they retired for a time to roast the tiny sweet morsels in the ashes and have a grand feast before the other children spied them.

"Heah's somethin' fine fer de chilluns," shouted Bill a little later, and there was a general rush toward him. Mandy gave a delighted squeal as she grabbed at the queer wet objects he held.

"What in the world are those funny things, and what do you do with 'em?" asked Sally.

"Dem's hog bladders. Us blows 'em up," said Mandy, and soon they were dancing about with long balloons floating bravely out from a switch.

But the next day there was too much going on to play very much, and they had to keep scooting from one place to another. At the meat bench, a great hog fell apart like magic, as Uncle Meat Jim's cleaver and Bill's knife struck in well placed blows; head, hams, shoulders, middling, back bone, ribs, all came out just exactly right.

Then Uncle Jim called loudly:

"Wha' dem lazy, triflin' womenfolks what had orter be saltin' dis meat?"

"Dey ain't no triflin' women 'bout dis place," sang out Aunt Maria, "but heah's de fines' meat packers in de lan'." They covered the pieces of hog with coarse salt and packed them away to stand till well cured or ready for smoking.

"Bring on dat sassage meat," came another call and Sally skipped over to where Dilsey was grinding the meat for Aunty, who always attended to sausage making herself. She sat at the table, weighing the bags of meat on the kitchen steel-yards, which Betsy held, and measuring carefully the right amount of pepper and salt and sage.

"Run to the storeroom, darling, and bring me another bag of sage," she said, and Sally hurried to obey. Then she tasted a pinch of the seasoning, her nose almost in the measure. Off she flew, sneezing and sputtering, for water. Aunty's helpers grinned broadly after her as they worked away; mixing the sausage meat; patting some into small flat cakes; stuffing some into links of paper-thin skin. Later Dilsey fried the cakes, packed them into tubs, and poured melted lard over them, and Thomas hung the stuffed sausage in the smoke house to cure slowly in the sweet hickory smoke till it had a delicious flavor.

"Le's go see Aunt Calline make lard," said Mandy, when Sally was herself again. So they trotted after Sam, who went by with great rolls of leaf lard and a basket of fat-meat trimmings for the lard pots.

Aunt Calline was bending over a pot where the fat was being tried out over a low fire. Little pieces of skin and lean meat, floating on top, were just turning brown and crisp, and she called to her helpers:

"Time to git dis here lard off! De cracklin's am done. Git er move on yer, gals." So they dipped out the scalding fat and strained it through coarse cloth into pots and pans, where it slowly cooled into snow-white lard. The cracklings were saved for corn bread.

Out on the plantation the word, "Hog-killin' up at de big house," quickly spread. By early afternoon the back fence was decorated with grinning black faces as they hung over the top plank, gazing blissfully at what was going on inside the yard. They called and chattered:

"Lawsy, ain't dem hogs er sight fer so' eyes!"

"Jes' look at Unc' Jim fling dat knife!"

"My mouf sho' do water fer some o' dem spare-ribs en some good ol' cracklin' bread!"

The workers called back in scorn.

"Shet yer mouf en git offen dat fence. Us ain't got nothin' fer no common fiel' niggers!" But nobody



minded this big talk, and they waited contentedly for the treat they knew would surely come. Aunty saw to it that each had a generous supply, and Sally proudly helped her. Then followed a chorus of thanks and a hasty shuffle for their own cabins, where later they sat with smacking lips around a royal pot! At the big house Thomas and Dilsey looked proudly at the smoke house, and for days to come everyone at White Hills feasted on good things. Brains scrambled

with eggs, rich, crumbly crackling bread, fried spare-ribs, backbone stew, with corn-meal dumplings, fresh sausage, pigs' feet dipped in batter and fried to a crisp brown, chitling, melts, tripe, and what not—enough and to spare!

The first hog killing of the year was a great success.

CHAPTER XX

JUST BEFORE CHRISTMAS

SALLY," said Aunty, one December morning, "it's high time we were getting your mother's Christmas box off. Are your presents all ready to put in?"

"Yes, ma'am, I'll get them right now," and soon she came flying into the sitting room where Aunty was carefully packing a wonderful fruit cake, while Becky tied up other packages.

Sally hovered over them as the box was slowly filled.

"Oh! oh! oh! Won't all of 'em at home just be plum silly about these scrumptious things!" she exclaimed. "And won't they be surprised that I can make such nice presents?" she added proudly as her own lovingly made gifts—a pretty bag for Mother, Father's neatly hemmed handkerchief and the aprons for Cook and Mammy—were tucked in at the last.

"It is a nice box," said Aunty. "There, I think everything is in."

Sally had a sudden fear:

"Why, Auntie, I don't believe there's a single thing from Brother, and I'm awful afraid he's forgotten all about them at home, he's so little." But not at all, for just then in trotted Van, carrying on his head a big, curious-looking contraption made of laths.

"It's a rabbit trap, Auntie," he said, beaming at her. "I made it my own self for my father and mother and Mammy. Put it in the box."

"It's a fine trap, darling," said Auntie, "but it's so big, I think we will keep it till they come. Hadn't you rather do that and help them catch a rabbit with it?"

But this wouldn't do at all, and Van was so heart broken at the idea that Uncle Louis couldn't bear it. He got a big box which would hold the Christmas package and Van's trap besides and sent them off together.

"Sister Kate will think we're crazy, but I can't have the little fellow unhappy at Christmas time. Well, I know one thing, I'd sure like to see them open that box!" He chuckled with much enjoyment at the thought.

"And I know another thing," said Auntie. "Christmas is coming fast, so we will all have to hustle if we are to get everything ready in time."

"Why, Auntie, it seems mighty slow to me!" exclaimed Sally. "It's bad enough back home with

just us, but when I think about the whole family coming over here Christmas Eve and all of us hanging up our stockings and everything, why, it just seems like the time'll never come."

"Can I hang up my stocking to-night, Aunty?" asked Van eagerly, and he kept on asking, as surprises were planned, presents finished, and mysteries deepened every day.

Richard carved and chipped away in the shop. Sally retired to the playroom with her secrets. Van sawed and hammered in the woodshed, and Lou was always slipping off, no one knew where. Aunty sewed on something dainty and white, which she covered when Sally came by, and someone was always bringing bundles over to White Hills which kept them all agog.

"What is that, Betsy? Let me feel," begged Sally as she reached out for a lumpy package that she caught Betsy putting in the closet. But Betsy was too quick. She swung it up high and grinned.

"Laroes fer ter catch meddlers—better look out, li'l' missy."

Then, too, someone was always calling:

"No, no, don't come in here right now!" and loud whispers came floating through doors and around corners.

"You sure do have to put your hands over your ears to keep from hearing," said Sally, "'specially when Brother's round."

"Dat's de truf," agreed Betsy. "Dat chile do hab de wus' time wid he's sweet li'l' mouf."

So for that matter did Sally and Lou and even Aunty. Uncle Louis was worst of all, and there never was any telling whether he was funning or really slipped.

"Oh, Sally," he called now, "I've just seen the nicest little d——," when pop went his hand over his mouth; then he said innocently. "Well, well, I nearly got caught *that* time." Sally flew at him and pounded him as hard as she could. He was so tantalizing!

"Richard has an unfair advantage over me," Uncle Louis went on with an injured air.

"Why?" demanded Sally.

"Well, he doesn't talk much anyhow, so he never gets into trouble, while I am just naturally such a big mouth I can't help myself."

"Mars' Louis sho' am de mos' onstreperous man," said Lou, as they all giggled anew.

Aunty tried to look severely at them.

"It's a good thing that *someone* in the family doesn't talk all the time or there would be no one at

all to listen," she said. But she had to laugh, too, as she turned to Dilsey, who had come in to remind her that it was time to make ginger cakes for the plantation Christmas treat.

With that, they moved into the kitchen, where great measures of sugar and flour, baskets of eggs, big pitchers of rich sweet milk and foamy buttermilk; crocks full of golden butter; spices, ginger, soda were waiting on the fresh-scrubbed tables.

Lou beat the eggs, Aunty and Dilsey mixed the rich brown dough, and Betsy rolled it thin and smooth. Sally cut out the cakes with the most delightful cutters of many shapes, a fat pig, a cat, a horse and stars, rings, hearts, and diamonds too. Little Dilsey put them into large flat pans, popped them in the oven, and watched till they were done.

"'Clare to goodness, Mistis, I don't see how we'd ever got dis Christmas cookin' done 'dout dis chile," said Dilsey admiringly, as Sally worked away with crimson cheeks at her cut-cut-cutting.

When the ginger cakes, dozens and dozens of big fat ones, were all made, Dilsey said, "Clear out now, en don't none er y'-all put yer foot back in dis kitchen till I says so, 'case I'se got ter hab plenty ob elbow room when I bakes my cakes en cooks." As they obeyed, she murmured:

"Lemme see now, poun' cake, silber cake, gold cake, marble cake, done made. Cocconut layer en er lemon cheese—dat's all fer ter-day."

Outside Sally spied Alex and Richard driving off in a big wagon.

"Wait, wait for me!" she shrieked, and scrambled up just in time to go with them for the Christmas tree and greens. They came back at twilight, and Alex put up the tall holly tree right away, so the decorations could go on that night.

And it was a beauty—all gay with its own red berries, rosettes of scarlet and gold leaves, strings of popcorn and cranberries, many sweet-gum balls—dipped in whitewash or bright paint—and tiny bees-wax candles!

"It's the prettiest one I ever saw," said Sally with a sigh of content, "and just think, we made all those things on it our very own selves."

Next morning in rushed John Louis and Mary Lyle, just home from college with a crowd of young folks. They had come to finish the decorating. Soon the house was a lovely fragrant place, with trailing vines of Southern smilax, festoons of cedar, wreaths of holly, and a great clump of mistletoe hanging under the parlor chandelier. Then Sally gathered a big bunch of violets, and some yellow roses which still



bloomed in the yard behind the chimney, as a final touch.

"Come on, Aunty, and play for us," said Cousin

John Louis, whirling Sally off in a waltz. Auntie went to the piano, and the big boys and girls danced on the broad veranda for a while; then they mounted their horses and rode away to pay other visits, calling:

"We'll sure be back to hang up our stockings to-night."

For Christmas Eve had come at last!

Soon after dinner the carriages began to arrive, and aunts and uncles with their big and little children piled out. All the White Hills household came hurrying to greet them, and there was much kissing and hugging, with everyone talking at once.

"You boys sure better behave yourselves *this* time," warned Sally and John, Jr., who was just sticking his tongue out at her, hastily took it in.

"Do *you* know what ol' Santa's going to bring you, Van?" asked Rob excitedly.

"Yes, I wrote him 'zackly what I wanted," shouted Van, jumping up and down.

"How's yo' gittin' on, Sis' Dilsey?" said fat Mammy Jane to equally fat Dilsey.

"Po'ly, po'ly, praise de Lawd," answered Dilsey with a wide grin. "En how's yo', yo' se'f?"

"Me? Well, I'se just tollabul," cheerfully answered Mammy

Inside the house great wood fires were blazing everywhere. Jerry and Sol went from one room to another, piling on big oak and hickory logs and fat pine knots, and the spicy fragrance of the cedar made everyone sniff with pleasure.

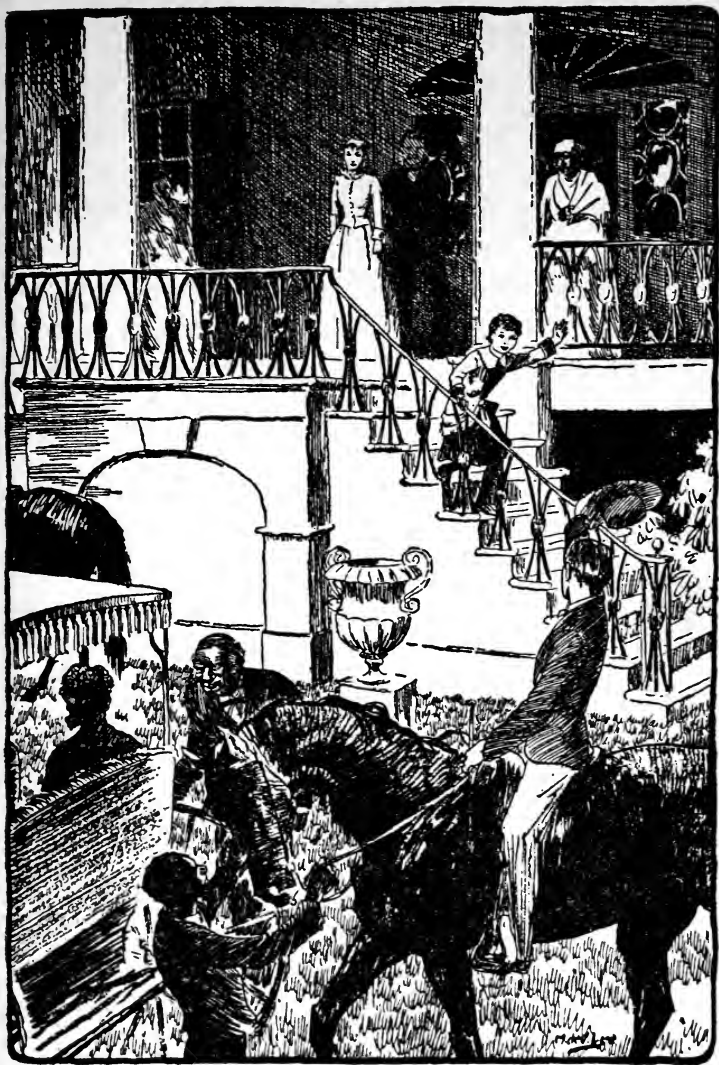
"Dear me, Sister, where *will* you put us all?" exclaimed Aunt Julia; but pallets were spread on the floor for the children, and the big boys were sent down to the overseer's old house, so there was plenty of room for everybody.

The little children went back to the playroom with their nurses, but the boys and Sally stayed around to run errands. Never were there such helpful, polite, agreeable children! Uncle Louis passed by, and his eyes twinkled, but he said gravely to Aunt Julia:

"Why *didn't* you bring John, Jr., and Henry? And I declare, where is Sally? She ought to be here to see these strange children," which made them giggle, of course.

"Isn't this the most fun you ever had in your life?" whispered Sally to Richard as she went flying past, and he nodded, "Yes."

After a gay picnic supper, Thomas lighted the Christmas candles. Then, in the flickering light, all the Lyles sang the loved old songs, Auntie's beautiful



Soon after dinner the carriages began to arrive



voice floating high above all the others, Sally's sweet treble close beside Uncle Louis's deep rumble.

Presently the children called:

"Let Sally tell us a story. Come on, Sally!" as they crowded down in front of the fire.

She had just finished, "'Twas the night before Christmas," when Jerry and Alex appeared with their fiddles. A general scramble to the hall for the Virginia Reel, and, to her great delight, Cousin John Louis swung Sally to the head of the line.

The servants crowded in the doors and clapped for their white folks, who danced till they could dance no longer, then dropped breathless and laughing to rest. But Uncle Louis would hardly give them a minute before he ordered.

"Get your stocking, every man Jack of you and every lady too."

"I want my stocking right on the mantel so Santa can see it the minute he gets down the chimney," said Van decidedly.

"So do I," said little Julia.

"Me too, me too!" shouted Rob and the other little children.

Thomas knew just what to do, and soon a piece of rope swung above the wide fireplace, laden with gay stockings fastened on with clothes pins.

"It looks like a one-legged family's wash," said Cousin John Louis. And the others shouted at the funny sight as they hung their own stockings on chair posts and sofas and even from the swinging lamp.

When this all important ceremony was over Uncle Louis said:

"Bedtime for everybody who is under twelve years old! And if there's any carrying on I'll sure see to it that Santa Claus leaves switches and ashes instead of presents."

"Oh, no, no, we *will* be good!" the children chorused, and scooted off to bed with many last threats of, "I'm going to catch *you* Christmas gif'," which died away in subdued giggles and whispers.

Now the grown-ups went to work with a will, for Santa Claus surely needed help, with so many stockings to fill!

By and by Thomas came in with a big bowl of eggnog, then "good-nights" and "happy dreams" were said. The old house was quiet at last, waiting for Santa Claus's sleigh bells and the tap of his reindeer on the roof.

CHAPTER XXI

CHRISTMAS GIF'!

IT WAS just daylight when John, Jr.'s, eyes flew open. He listened but did not hear a sound.

"Oh, goody, goody," he whispered to himself. "I'll catch 'em all, Sally first!" He crept out of bed so as not to waken the other boys, slipped across the hall into the room where Sally and the little girls were sleeping, then yelled at the top of his voice: "Christmas Gif', Sally! Christmas Gif'! Christmas Gif', *everybody* in the house!" as he rushed down the hall.

The next moment everything was in an uproar with laughter and shouting!

"Christmas Gif', Lou!" "Christmas Gif', Van!" "Christmas Gift, Aunt Louise!" "Christmas Gif', Mammy!" "Christmas Gif', mistis!" came from all directions, as each tried to catch the other first.

The children piled into Uncle Louis's room, and there he lay, eyes shut tight, not a movement. They pounded him and yelled in his ears and tickled him and called "Christmas Gif'!" till they were tired, but

never an answer could they get except one loud snore. Finally Auntie said:

"If you children don't go get dressed in a hurry you can't have your stockings till after breakfast."

This sent them flying, and in a few moments down swept the excited crowd to the sitting room, where the fire was crackling and roaring up the chimney at a great rate. And everywhere hung fat nobby stockings, each with a gay colored sky rocket or Roman candle, flanked by a red pack of firecrackers at the top, and goodness knows what else inside. Beneath them were packages which Santa found too big to go into the stockings.

Digging for treasure began in a hurry but lasted a long time!

"O-o-ee!" squealed Sally. "Just look at my beautiful sweet pocketbook, Lou."

"Catch, sister, catch," called Van, bouncing a gay striped ball toward her.

"I've got the biggest knife of anybody," said John, Jr., proudly waving a fine new pocketknife.

"No, you haven't, I've got one just like it," said Henry, waving his too.

"Ain't nobody but me got red gloveses," said Lou, holding them up for all to admire.

Finally Van pulled out the last of his nuts and

raisins and reached the toe of his stocking, where he found a shining red apple and a golden orange. He looked eagerly around.

"Not a single one of us got switches an' ashes. Oh, goody, goody, goody!" he said happily.

A moment of quiet, then that very "onstreperous" man, Uncle Louis, suddenly appeared in the door and said quickly:

"Christmas Gift, Sally, John, Jr., Henry . . ." and went on calling their names so fast that he did catch every single one of them almost before they knew he was there.

They all shouted and protested:

"But we caught you a long time ago!"

"Me? Why, I've just waked up," he answered. "I haven't heard a sound," and they couldn't do a thing about it, though they argued all through breakfast with him.

"Goodness me," exclaimed Sally, in the midst of the hubbub, "I've got to go right down to the quarters to catch Mandy, or she'll get me, and I'll sure be the cow's tail this Christmas!" Lou and Van wanted to go too, so they hurried off with a basket full of pretty cakes for their black playmates, boxes of snuff for the older darkies, and a doll for Mandy.

All the way down they were greeted with a wild

hullabaloo, but Sally did catch Mandy, whose mouth, much to her disgust, was crammed so full of hoecake she couldn't even sputter! Sally and Van emptied their basket and then filled it again, for the little darkies had scaly-barks, cunning little green and yellow gourds, and pretty colored beans for them, and Aunt Callie had made two wonderful corn-shuck dolls.

Back at the house they found the other children and the big boys out in the yard popping firecrackers and quickly joined in.

By and by the plantation darkies began coming up to the big house to say, "Christmas Gif'," too. Aunty and Uncle Louis couldn't bear to give up the old customs, especially since so many of the family slaves and their children had stayed on after the war. Even in the hardest years they had managed to have something for a Christmas treat.

To-day a great keg of home-made scuppernong wine and trays of ginger cakes, with gay tarlatan bags of raisins and store candy for smaller darkies, were all ready on the back porch. Great-aunt Jeanette was in charge, and there was much talk of the old days before the war.

All morning the most enticing smells had been floating out from the kitchen, and Dilsey had to



Thomas finally announced in great style, "Mistis, dinner is served."



chase the children away from the door many times before Thomas finally announced in great style:

"Mistis, dinner is served."

A moment of confusion, then Aunty on Great-uncle Roger's arm led a fine procession to the dining room, where Thomas, with Jerry and Alex in attendance, stood with magnificent dignity near the door, Betsy and Lou close behind. Such gallant attentions, as all the gentlemen, from Uncle Louis to Van, looked after the ladies, and such pretty graces and smiles from the ladies in turn as they were being seated!

Indeed, it was an impressive sight just to watch John, Jr., escort, with great propriety, his demure cousin Sally to her place.

But she wasn't demure many minutes. Her eyes grew big as saucers, and she just managed to smother a squeal as she stared at the table now reaching the full length of the dining room, and truly a sight to behold.

In the center was a huge silver tray, and on this a bowl of charlotte russe surrounded with tall goblets of syllabub. At Aunty's end of the table there were baked hams—one brown and hot, all stuck with cloves; the other stuffed and cold. Along the sides there were roast ducks; a small roast pigling; a chicken pie big enough to set before a king; dishes

of squash, candied sweet potatoes, boiled rice, butter beans; scalloped oysters in a silver baking dish; bowls of potato and chicken salad; celery in tall cut-glass holders; peach pickles, mustard pickles, water-melon rind pickles; preserves of every kind; cheese straws, and other delicacies besides.

And there, in front of Uncle Louis, was the biggest, brownest turkey gobbler Sally had ever seen in her life. She was so excited that John, Jr., had to poke her three times before she bowed her head for the blessing, and then she couldn't keep both eyes shut at once.

"Light meat or dark?" inquired Uncle Louis, as he carved that magnificent turkey in a truly magnificent manner, and each had his heart's desire. The children all waited politely till the grown-ups were served, and then came their turn—everything they wanted!

Little Dilsey came flying in from the kitchen with piping hot rolls and beaten biscuit. Thomas carved the hams and other meats, and Jerry, Alex and Betsy passed dish after dish, till the plates were piled sky-high? Ceremony was soon forgotten, and everyone chattered and laughed as they ate and ate and ate.

A loud chorus of Oh's and Ah's arose when Thomas

marched in at dessert time with a blazing plum pudding and Alex followed with hot mince pie. Betsy cut cake for all who would accept; fragrant coffee with thick cream and nuts and raisins were served last.

Finally the toasts were drunk—to Christmas, to the old days, to the happy future!

"Honestly, I don't believe I'll ever eat another bite as long as I live," said Sally, and the others felt the same way.

For a little while everyone was too full for utterance, or movement either, but soon Uncle John called from the yard: "Come on out, everybody, we've got to play this dinner down!" So they all came tumbling out into the sunshine.

They played "hide and go seek," "skip-to-my-Lou," "drop handkerchief," "blind-man's bluff," and finally ended up with a tug of war, with Uncle Louis and Uncle John choosing sides. Uncle John's side won, and Van was the "rotten egg," which hurt his feelings so that he cried.

"Dear me," said Aunt Louise, looking up at the sun, "we sure must get started for home or the dark will catch us."

More bustle followed, and then they were gone. Soon the servants, too, were hurrying off to their own

Christmas frolic down at the barn, which was decorated in great splendor, and now the family at White Hills settled cozily around their sitting room for the first real look at their presents.

Everyone had tried to do the most delightful things for Richard, and he could not believe all those gifts were really his. He did not say very much, but his blue eyes were deep and shining as he smiled at Auntie when she asked:

"A happy Christmas, Son?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" he answered fervently.

Sally fairly bubbled over with delight as she flew from one thing to another. She dressed up in the dainty embroidered net frock with its blue ribbons from Auntie, added her new blue locket, and kissed everyone all round. She admired over and over the carved box from Richard, the doll quilt Lou had so carefully made of tiny pieces, and gave Uncle Louis an extra kiss for her new *Chatterbox*.

"I know I just have the darlingest, sweetest, nicest presents of anybody!" she exclaimed.

"No, Sister, mine are the best," and Van hugged a real hammer, his special request from Santa Claus, while Auntie smiled happily toward the parlor where her new carpet at last was spread.

As for Uncle Louis—well, he said the desire of his heart was granted.

"I have the finest rabbit trap in the world," he declared proudly, and Van with beaming face said:

"I just knew you wanted a rabbit trap, Uncle Louis, I made it all by myself!" For Van had worked early and late on these queer things of his own design, and everyone in the family had received one.

"It's surely enough to trap any rabbit," said Uncle Louis, examining his carefully as Van explained the workings. "He would be so overcome by curiosity over it that anyone could pick him up."

Then they chatted about the day's happenings and made plans.

"When are we going to see Bess?" Sally wanted to know.

"On New Year's Eve," said Aunty. "We will receive with Cousin Jennie on New Year's morning and go calling on our friends in the afternoon." Uncle Louis added:

"We'll all dress up, Sally, and you'll see what a distinguished uncle you have when I put on a stove-pipe hat and gloves and a long-tail coat. Why, I'll be as elegant as Dr. Barnes! That reminds me of something—Dr. Barnes says our smart son is doing

so well in his books he will be ready for the Academy by fall."

Aunty and Sally both exclaimed proudly over this news. And truly the tall lad, a bit awkward but very good-looking, who smiled shyly at them, was one to be proud of. His naturally fine mind was now developing so fast that it was startling. Affectionate interest everywhere had slowly opened his own heart till he showed his real self. Very quiet, but a very loyal, earnest boy he was, deeply anxious to prove himself worthy. Perhaps no one realized quite how hard he did try, but nowadays no one would suspect that he was not a real son of the house, and everyone loved him.

"Do you see how like your father he grows?" whispered Aunty. Uncle Louis nodded, for Richard did seem to have that reserve and dignity of old Major Lyle which not one of his own gay, easygoing sons showed. They were silent for a moment, then Sally burst forth:

"Everybody says, 'Happy New Year,' but *I* say, 'Happy Old Year,' too. Hasn't it been just the most scrumptious year!"

"I should say so," Uncle Louis said. "Just think of such richness for old White Hills: a new gin, a new parlor carpet, a new young master. two blessed

children, and a wonderful cotton crop! Yes, sir, the New Year will surely have to hump itself if it beats this one!"

Just then, Van, who was tired of so much talk, remembered the fireworks.

"Oh, Uncle Louis," he called from the window. "It's all dark! Let's go shoot our sky rockets and Roman candles an' things."

When this display was over, eyes grew very heavy, and by the time the fiddles began to tune up at the barn everyone was almost asleep.

"Oh, dear," said Sally, "I promised Betsy I'd come down to see the dance, but I'm just plum beat out, Aunty, so I reckon I'll have to go to bed instead."

"Like Sally, I am plum beat out myself," said Uncle Louis, with a grin that turned into a yawn. "It's just as well, honey, that Christmas don't come but once a year."

Aunty drowsily agreed.

Richard lay awake for a little while, trying to recall last Christmas in the little cabin on the mountain side, without presents, without even a special dinner, but it all seemed a dream, this other life of his. Here at White Hills were home and reality. In the flickering firelight he could see the new suit and shirt,

folded carefully on the chest. He reached out and touched lovingly the very first books he had ever owned. He fingered the beautiful shotgun, with its shining steel and polished wood, lying beside him.

Then he nestled down in the warm feather bed, and he, too, was asleep.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE FAIRY-WOODS

NO ONE knew what became of that winter! What with sewing and quilting; reading and lessons; making candy, popping corn, cracking nuts, telling stories, and singing around the fire; playing at the gin, in the haymow and corncrib, January was gone before they realized it. February followed, leaving fragrant white hyacinths and newly awakened violets, while some of the early peach trees foolishly opened their pink buds. Indeed, there were so many warm sunshiny days in winter and so many rainy days in spring that it was hard to tell which was which, a great deal of the time.

March came roaring fiercely, then suddenly turned lamb-like, and here it was real spring again.

"Goodness!" said Sally, "I sure must go down to the Fairy-woods to-day and see about the violets. They ought to be open, and I want to pick some."

"Vi'lets or no vi'lets, I ain't er-gwine ter no Fai'y-woods," said Lou. "Hits 'bout time fer

hongry snakeses ter come out er dey holes, en I sho' don't want 'em tastin' on me."

Van agreed with her, so Sally skipped off by herself down the path to her Fairy-woods.

It was still early springtime, but down in the hollow the crab apples were showing their pink buds and sending out a faint perfume. The wild plum thicket was full of feathery bloom, and higher up on the slope a blue carpet spread everywhere; the wild violets were out! Sally stepped carefully, stopping now and then to touch them lovingly, when suddenly there was a flash of scarlet and a burst of melody, and she looked up at a glorious red cardinal who swung just in front of her on a low bough.

"Oh, you darling, darling bird!" she chanted, as he cocked his handsome head at her and began his song again. "And you darling, darling violets! I'll just have to take some of you back to Auntie!"

But first she ran down the ravine to look at the brook and see what other treasures were coming out.

The wild honeysuckle, soon to be a gorgeous mass of color, was only showing tight buds on its stiff bare stems. The may-apples were just coming out of the ground, the dogwood—but what in the world was this she saw! For, from the midst of the thicket there

appeared the queerest thing that ever grew on a plum bush. Sally thought she had never seen anything so funny as that black face and woolly head, wreathed about with all this fairy whiteness! The face grinned in answer to her giggle, and broad white teeth matched the circling blossoms.

"Mornin', li'l' miss!" came the greeting.

Sally looked again.

"Who are you?" she asked.

The head ducked out of sight a minute and then came back, the grin still there.

"I'se jes' a po' starvin' nigger what's runnin' from de patterollers," it said. "Won't li'l' miss git me sumpin' t'eat widout nobody knowin'? I ain't er-gwine ter do nobody no harm."

A slight noise up the bank, and the head disappeared.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Sally, giggling again. "You're 'zackly like the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland."

"No'm, I ain't no kind o' cat, dat I ain't, but I sho' am hongry. *Please, please*, honey, go fotch me jes' a piece o' corn pone."

"Well, I'll try," said Sally. "I need a basket for my violets, anyway."

Nobody was in the yard as she went in, and her

basket was on the kitchen porch. Near it she spied a new-baked skillet of dog bread. Sally quickly tipped it into her basket and ran back to the grove.

The head was there to greet her, and a skinny arm came out eagerly to grab the bread.

"Bress yo' heart, honey. Scipio ain't nebber gwine ter fergit dis," a satisfied voice mumbled through the bushes a moment later.

Scipio—where *had* Sally heard that name? There was no Scipio at White Hills. She just couldn't think. Then she forgot everything in the joy of filling her basket with violets, till presently a cautious voice asked:

"Li'l' miss, is dere a bigety proud-actin' nigger up at de big house by de name o' Thomas?"

"Course Thomas is there," answered Sally. "Do you know him?"

"Hit mout be de same one, but li'l' Miss ain't er gwine ter tell on me, is she?" he whined. "I ain't no sure-nuff mean nigger, I'se jes' in trouble."

He did sound so scared and pitiful that Sally felt very sorry for him. She promised all the help she could give, waved good-bye, and started toward the house. On the way she kept thinking, Scipio? Scipio? How that name bothered her!

Then it came! Richard—Uncle Richard—the war

—his boy Scipio who ran away to the Yankies—Sally's heart pounded fiercely. Suppose this was the right one and he could tell them about Richard! Suppose he got away—and yet how she hated to tell on him! Then she thought of Thomas. She found him alone in the smoke house.

"Thomas," she called breathlessly, "listen; quick! There's a nigger hid in the grove who says he is hiding from the police. He asked me to slip him something to eat, and he called himself Scipio. Oh, Thomas, do you s'pose it could be Uncle Richard's Scipio come back?"

Thomas gave a gulp and nearly fell off the ladder.

"Oh, my Lawd! Come, honey, and show Thomas quick!" He caught a piece of rope he had been using and shot off toward the grove in a very hasty and un-Thomas-like way.

"You won't let the police get him, Thomas?" she pleaded, as she pointed out the place.

"No, no. Now run back, baby," he said, and hurried on.

A short time later he was back, with him a tall, skinny darky who protested but stepped along in a lively fashion. They slipped in at the front door, and nobody else saw them go by. Sally hurried to the back yard and showed her basket of violets to Dilsey,

though she was so excited she could hardly speak. Dilsey, who was fussing about the missing bread, stopped a moment and said:

"Yes, honey, dem's pow'ful nice," and then went on loudly about the bread. "En I sez, *whar* am dat dog pone? Nemmine, ef I gits holt er dat low-down t'ief, I'se gwine ter wear out he's side—nigger er varmint er critter, dat's what I is!"

Sally wanted to shout, "I did it, Dilsey!" but she shut her lips tightly and waited, though time surely did drag.

Finally Auntie called her and said:

"Run down to Mandy's and play, dear, but don't say a word about this, especially to Richard. It *is* Uncle Richard's Scipio, and I'll tell you more to-night."

"Yes, Auntie, I'll be quiet, but I *may* pop right open," Sally said.

Auntie laughed and hoped not, and Sally was gone.

At last the afternoon was over, and the notes of the supper horn floated out toward the fields. Somehow, to Sally, it had a triumphant sound! At supper there was something so thrilling and tense in the air that Richard asked:

"What's the matter with everybody, and what's the excitement?"

"Why, *I* caught a bird in my trap," sang out Van.
"I did, sure enough, Richard. It was a chicken!"

Of course everyone laughed, and that helped to make things easier.

While Van was going to bed Auntie talked to Sally.

"You were a sensible, brave little girl, darling, and we are proud of you. Scipio says your uncle Richard married a mountain girl not long before the battle in which he was killed, and we think we can find out all about it now, but we don't want Richard to know till we are sure. We're keeping Scipio safe, but we think he is more frightened than he need be. Can you keep all this a secret a while longer?"

"Of course I can, Auntie. I am a big girl now. I'll be mighty careful," said Sally with an important air.

Finally Uncle Louis said he wanted to see Sally and Richard and Auntie about something right after dinner. He opened a door usually kept locked, and they went up a few steps into a room which the children had never seen. Here sat Sally's friend of the plum bush, now quite sleek and shiny. Sally smiled at him as they went in.

"Well, if I *did* tell on you, Scipio, isn't this better than the ditch and the dog's pone?" she asked.

"Yas-s-ma'am—m!" agreed Scipio, as he gazed lovingly at the remains of his supper—a noble one,

from the looks of his dishes—which he was just finishing.

Then his eye fell upon Richard, and in a moment he had dropped to the floor and was crawling toward him. He began to croon softly as he patted the boy's feet:

"Oh, Mars' Richard, honey, dey didn't kilt yo', did dey?"

Richard drew back, greatly startled. Uncle Louis put his hand kindly on the crouching Negro's shoulder and said:

"No, Scip, stand up and look."

Scipio started up; the tears were running down his cheeks, and Sally's tears began to come too.

"Not Mars' Richard. I fergot de time. Den—den—hit's Mars' Richard's chile, dat's de truf'—'tain't nobody else. Ol' Scip nebber knowed 'bout dat!"

Richard's eyes were troubled, but Uncle Louis said.

"It's all right, son, we know at last."

Sally began dancing around and shouting through her tears:

"It's Scipio—your father's boy in the war. Oh, Richard, I knew, I knew!"

Thomas appeared from nowhere, grinning broadly. He had quite forgiven Scipio, it seemed. Then the

whole story was told to Richard. Everybody helped, for everybody had his own share to tell. Scipio's tale was first.

Among the mountaineers that came into the soldiers' camp to sell food or whisky was a man named Brady, who lived back about six miles in Jack's Cove. He had a pretty young daughter, Mary, who usually came with him in the big covered wagon. Soldiers would crowd around and try to talk with her, but she was always shy and just stared at them or pulled her sunbonnet over her face.

Then, the first thing Scipio knew, Richard Lyle was slipping out of camp to see her. He made Scipio help him, and the poor darkey was scared and troubled. He was afraid his young master would get caught and punished, and more afraid of what his old master would do if he found out. For Grandfather Lyle was a very proud, grand old gentleman, and his children and slaves stood in great awe of him, though they loved him dearly.

By and by there were rumors that the Yankees were coming near, and one night Richard Lyle said:

"Scip, Mary and I are going to get married tomorrow. I have leave, and we'll start early. Have the horses ready."

Scipio begged and pleaded. He talked of "po' white

trash—Ol' Marster's rage—de folkes worriment"—the pride of the Lyle name. But Richard was wildly in love and would not listen. In Bankville, a little town over the mountain from the camp, Mary and Richard were married. The preacher's name was Walker, and the man who gave the license, Ed Lee. Scipio knew both very well later when the Yankees occupied the town and he was with them.

Mary went back home with her father, and Richard and Scipio came back to camp. Not a soul at camp knew. The army was in a troubled, disorganized state, with many desertions, and Richard easily slipped out to see his wife. He was very afraid someone would tell his father. That was always on his mind.

"Just as soon as the war is over, I'll take her home, Scip. If only Father sees her he won't care," he often said, "but I don't want him to know till then."

Soon after this the Yankees did come, and, with that dreadful fighting which took so many, many young lives, both armies swept on.

Mary and her father came anxiously to the meeting place for news. Scipio was there, but there alone. His young master had not come back. For half the night the three searched through the woods and field where his company had fought. At last they found

him, unconscious—dead, Scipio thought, but Mary said:

“No, no, he’s alive,” and she pleaded and cried till Scipio and her father took him to the wagon and on to their cabin. There Scipio knelt and put his head against his master’s heart. It was just beating and seemed to go more slowly each moment. Then it stopped! Terrified, he rushed out and tried to get back to camp and lost his way. At daylight he saw a Yankee outpost in the woods. He was afraid of his old master at home; of what he knew and had done. His young master was dead. So he stumbled into the Yankee camp, asked for protection, and stayed with them till the war was over. Since then he had been drifting around, finally getting to Mobile and working on the river boats.

So often he wanted to come back and see his folks, but always he was afraid. Thomas nodded.

“He always was afraid, Mars’ Louis, you remember, of everything from the time he was a baby. His ma said he was marked for fear.”

Then a few days ago he got into this fight on the boat, and maybe killed a nigger. He slipped off at White Hills’ landing and came home!

Next Sally told her tale, and then Thomas added his bit.

Last came Uncle Louis's part. It was easy, for now they knew names and places. He telegraphed to the town where the marriage took place and found that what Scipio had said was true. Then someone was sent out to Jack's Cove, and all that happened after Scipio ran away was made clear. Several people in Jack's Cove neighborhood knew all about the whole affair. The young soldier did not die the night of the battle. Somehow he pulled back to life; not to his old life, however, for he had forgotten who he was and all about himself. He seemed to get well and soon took to mountain ways. Mary never let him get out of her sight, even to go hunting, people said. She was afraid his family would come and take him away from her, or that he would remember and go back to them.

Their little boy was born three years after the war. Soon afterward his father went to sleep one night and never wakened again. Mary "took on" for a time, but soon she seemed to get over it and settled down quietly.

Jim did not belong in that part of the mountains. He tramped in from no one knew where, worked with old man Brady, and later Mary married him. After the old man's death they drifted off, taking the baby with them, and never came back.

Richard listened and listened. He couldn't say anything, but his eyes showed the deep content that swelled and spread through his heart. His name was truly Richard Lyle, and he was a real member of the family. When the tale was all told they went into the parlor, and Uncle Louis opened the great Bible at the Lyle family record. There he wrote Richard and his mother's names and made all the dates right.

Sally and Thomas and Scipio wept again, and Auntie said proudly with her arm around Richard:

"But *our* son's name was already Richard Lyle, and we knew that he was a true gentleman!"

Then she had Thomas bring in some peach brandy, and they all drank Richard's health.

"Mars' Louis," said Scipio, as he smacked his lips over his glass, "when de patterollers quits lookin' fer me, kin I wait on young Mars' Richard, same as I did he's pa?"

"I reckon not, Scip. Come back to earth," said Uncle Louis. "We all have to wait on ourselves these days, and that reminds me, Mr. Roan says there's nobody after you. You'll have to get plowing tomorrow if you stay round here, you black rascal!"

"Amen," said Thomas loudly, as he took Scipio by the arm and the two went off, chuckling, to the

quarters for a grand reunion with the other family darkies.

Of course, there was another stir among the relatives, and strangely enough it seemed that nearly all of them had *always* believed from the *very first* that this was "our Richard's son!"

Uncle Louis's eyes twinkled often and much, and he kept making embarrassing reminders to the many cousins, till Auntie made him stop.

"Don't you think, Auntie," said Sally, "that we ought to give Richard a birthday party—a great big one, and celebrate just like the Fourth of July?"

"Perhaps—how would you like that, Son?" Auntie looked smilingly at him.

Richard's face was a study. Blank consternation, deep dismay, then finally a grin to prove again that he was a real Lyle.

"All right, Sally," he said, "you just have that party and *I'll* run away sure enough this time, even if I have to go to the Yankees myself!"

Sally and Scipio shared honors in this latest and most thrilling episode in Richard's history. Sally, warned by the boys' frequent mention of bobcats or ha'nts, kept her accounts carefully subdued. But Scipio's tales grew daily more exciting and less true,

as he recovered from his fear and realized that "Ol' Marster" could never punish him again.

He stayed at White Hills for two or three months, then grew restless and went back to river work; stopping off now and then to see them all.

After a while he came no more.



CHAPTER XXIII

LAST LOOK!

EVERYONE was so busy and happy that not a soul was prepared for a letter from Mother which said that at last things were all right again at home and she wanted her children at once. *Did* they realize they had been away a whole year?

Such consternation! For home had become a very shadowy place to the children, while the White Hills family had quite forgotten that Van and Sally were only loaned for a time, not given outright. But there was nothing else to do, so clothes and treasures were collected as soon as possible. All the boys came with farewell gifts, and at each visit Sally's tears flowed anew.

"It makes me feel like a funeral or something awful, the boys are so good and different," she sobbed, and she shed bucketfuls of tears as she said good-bye to each loved animal and friend and spot.

Uncle Louis and Richard looked gloomy, and Auntie had a dreadful time trying to cheer up her household when she felt so sad herself. Only Lou



was cheerful: she was to go to live with the children, and she liked town.

The trunks were sent on ahead, for the roads were bad, so the slow-moving ox team had to be used in-

stead of mules. Lou went on the wagon with the trunks. She was all bundled up in a quilt, but she grinned broadly and minded not at all the raindrops which rolled over her brown face. Indeed, she looked so delighted that Van and Sally were strongly attracted to her method of travel and begged for a quilt and the ox cart too, rather than their commonplace horseback riding.

The last day was very moist. It still rained, and Sally, Dilsey, Betsy, Little Dilsey, and Mandy all boo-hooed loudly, Van joining in sympathy, though he really did not quite understand what it was all about.

There was, however, some compensation for Sally, for Father couldn't come all the way, so they were to travel alone as far as Birmingham. Then Dilsey fixed such a beautiful lunch, and Aunty said, "When you come back," so often, that they all brightened up and began to make plans as they rode in to town.

"I will surely come, this fall, to see you," said Aunty, "and perhaps we can send Richard up for a visit before his school begins," while Sally added:

"And we will just make Mother and Father bring us down next Christmas."

"I'll take good care of Daisy and keep her coat as shiny as satin," promised Richard.

"I'll put her mane and tail up in curl papers every night so they'll be nice and crimp," added Uncle Louis, with his old twinkle back again. So, after all, the last good-byes were not so sad.

As the train puffed away and the horses turned back toward White Hills, Aunty *did* hold Richard's hand very tight. Uncle Louis cleared his throat several times.

"Well, well," he said, "I *am* glad that we've got one child of our own, anyway. Nobody better try to take him away, I can tell you."

"I wouldn't go if they did. I have the best home and father and mother in the whole world, and I'll never leave them!" said Richard, suddenly eloquent, and somehow they all felt comforted and content once more.

As for the others, they had a fine trip and a safe arrival. Mother and Father were radiant with joy, Mammy and Cook were so pleased too! The children felt a little shy at first, but presently they were chattering like mad. And all at once Sally knew that, however delightful it was to go a-roaming and have exciting adventures, it was sweetest of all to have one's very own father and mother and home again.

They were all laughing and talking and rejoicing together when a soft, queer little gurgle came from

the bedroom, then another. Mammy disappeared; Mother followed. Before Sally could investigate, they were back, and in Mammy's arms she spied—yes, a baby—no, two babies!

Sally gave one look and squealed:

“Whose are they? Tell me quick, somebody!”

“Ours,” said Mother proudly. “Two darling new brothers for you and Van, Sally.”

Sally gasped. “Oh, Mother, how could you,” she exclaimed reproachfully. “*More boys!*”

THE END

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